MICRO AND MACRO ETHNICITY: ETHNIC PREFERENCE AND STRUCTURES IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

In this study, the task of assessing the strength of Malaysian ethnicity, in particular that of Chinese ethnicity, was undertaken. The core to this dissertation is an application in a questionnaire study of the contention that individuals 'align' themselves with ethnic groups (symbols and loyalties) in different ways in different circumstances. The study tries to reveal this by asking hypothetical questions about how a typical Chinese Malaysian might act under various circumstances of value conflicts where ethnic preference is presumed to be in conflict with self-interest of material and status kind and personal obligation. This is a replication of the method used by Mansor (1992) in studying peoples' estimations of the likely actions of a 'characteristic Malay actor'.

The present study displays some criticism of the methodology employed in this study, and that of Mansor's, and of the wider conclusions which he reaches, i.e. ethnicity is weakening in the processes of modernisation and economic development in Malaysia. First, the questions employed are chiefly about the micro-social sphere. The findings cannot necessarily be transferred to conclusions about the macro-social level of ethnic relations in Malaysia. Second, that the rational choice model underlying the questions ought to be complemented by an analysis of constraint and structure. Thirdly, that actual interpretation of the meaning of responses in the questionnaire study is open to a wider range of possibilities than one may at first recognise. The findings which support the notion of different levels of ethnicity, invite critical analysis of the very nature of the social contexts in which ethnicity may take on relevance. The study appears to show that while individuals may not express attitudes of a kind overtly consistent with 'blind' ethnic loyalty in some circumstances, they do strongly indicate the persistence of ethnic sentiments and the importance of ethnic identity in matters related to one's family and culture. On the other hand, to reach a sound conclusion about the strength of ethnicity in Malaysia, we cannot ignore the force of macro-ethnicity that is profoundly shaped at the higher political structural level by the Constitution, political decisions and public policies. Issues of macro-ethnicity, as revealed by the responses to the political attitude questions, shows that ethnic antagonism continues to persist in Malaysian society as a consequence of ethnically defined social inequalities and the feeling on the part of the non-Malays that they are discriminated against and excluded. The test on the effect of 'modernisation' does not indicate support to the weakening of ethnic boundaries and ethnic antagonistic attitudes in Malaysia.

Memorandum

In accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Bristol, I declare that full reference has been made to all published and unpublished sources used, and that all advice and assistance received has been acknowledged. Otherwise, this thesis is the original work of the author. It has not been previously presented for a degree at this or any other university.

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Chapter 1

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ETHNICITY IN MALAYSIA: HISTORICAL AND STRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVES

Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War, several polyethnic countries have emerged as new nations after achieving independence from Western colonial rule. In the process of nation building, one of the common problems faced by these countries is how to bring about political stability and unity among their ethnically diverse peoples who seem to have no binding common identity (Shils, 1963; Weiner, 1965). Malaysia is one such new state, and with a population composed of three major ethnic groups (Malays, Chinese, Indians), this problem is a very pressing one for the nation (Enloe, 1968/69; Ghazali, 1970).

Divisions among these people have always been marked and even during colonial rule, there were not any attempts to create a united society. These ethnic groups lacked a sense of common belonging to one political and social community. Clifford Geertz (1963) has referred to this situation in these societies as a situation where the sentiment of *primordialism* takes precedence over civil unity, loyalty or politics. Primordialism which refers to the 'original' bond of ethnic loyalty is seen as the fundamental and stable identity for a person in these societies. This situation is defined as being very vulnerable to serious ethnic conflict (Geertz, 1963:109; Shils, 1963).

In a society like Malaysia, primordial ties may be seen as a major cause for divisions among people of different ethnic origins. These ties are believed to create a narrow parochial communal sentiment among people, which becomes a primary reason for the maintenance of ethnic group culture, identity and the development of communal politics. *Communalism*, or the *politics of communalism* has been described as the main form of political mobilisation in a given society (Melson & Wolpe, 1970; Ratnam, 1965). Each group possesses its own set of leaders and political organisations, and political mobilisation is based on ethnic group sentiments and loyalty. This political mobilisation of ethnic identity and group solidarity has contributed to 'problems of ethnicity' in different nations, not least Malaysia. It may be difficult to deny totally the influence of primordialism in the lives of the people who are still strongly attached to traditional cultures and religions. On the other hand, the development of ethnicity and ethnic conflict has also been shaped by people's experiences and major events in the social history of the country.

Since the time of colonial rule, ethnicity in Malaysia has emerged to play a vital role in politics among the different ethnic groups in competing for their group interests and promoting their separate ethnic identities. Social divisions and inequalities among these ethnic groups have contributed towards the political mobilisation of ethnic allegiance and the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia. As one of the polyethnic societies in the world, Malaysia shares some

common features with other such societies, notably with other developing third world societies which are composed of different ethnic and racial groups. Although ethnicity has appeared as more or less a permanent fixture of contemporary societies, the degree of complexity and the factors that influence ethnic relations are different from society to society. In any study undertaken to understand the extent of ethnicity, it is very important to begin with a clear socio-historical account of the development of ethnicity in that country. With this objective in mind, this chapter will discuss the development and the role of ethnicity in Malaysia from a historical and structural perspective.

Political Background

Malaysia[1] came into being in 1957 after achieving its independence from Britain. Prior to western colonisation, the region had existed as a part of the 'Malay Archipelago'. This term refers to a much wider geographical area where the population is basically believed to belong to the Malay 'stock', more or less sharing the same cultural and historical background, and has been under the influence of the same traditional political powers (Andaya & Andaya, 1982: 7-36). The Malay Archipelago has received western traders since the sixteenth century. The colonisation process by Western Powers, particularly the struggle between the Dutch and the British to occupy this part of the world,

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1 Malaysia was known as the Federation of Malaya. With Sarawak, Sabah and Singapore joining the Federation in 1963 the larger entity was renamed as Malaysia.

led to a division of the region with the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824 (Andaya, 1982: 114).

The British colonial involvement in Malaysia started with the opening of a British entrepot in Singapore in 1819, which eventually led to the creation of British Malaya by 1919. In this year, the administration of the states of the Straits Settlement (Singapore, Penang and Malacca), Federated Malay States, Unfederated Malay States (in Peninsular Malaya) and British Borneo territories (Sabah and Sarawak) was brought under one centralised colonial control. Colonial rule came to an end in 1957 with the independence of Peninsular Malaya. When Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak achieved their independence, they joined Malaya to form Malaysia in 1963. In 1965, however, Singapore separated from Malaysia to set itself up as an independent state, attributing the separation to the problem of ethnic relations between the Malays and non-Malays, mainly the Chinese.

Creation of a Polyethnic Society

The Malaysian polyethnic society of today mainly consists of three major ethnic groups. The Malays are the indigenous people, while the Chinese and Indians are the immigrants. Although this polyethnic society of Malaysia was the result of British colonial rule (Freedman, 1960), it was, however not the first time these people had come in contact with each other. Before the arrival of colonial power, the Malays

had already established contact with Chinese and Indians traders, as well as Arabs and early Europeans like the Portuguese (Andaya & Andaya, 1982). The Malaysian peninsular has historically been a major crossroads for trade in Asia. The Malays had adopted some of the cultural elements of the people with whom they came into contact, mainly in the form of Hindu religion and Indian culture, and later, Islamic religion and culture.

A small number of these early Chinese, Indians, Arab and Portuguese traders had also settled down, married local people and assimilated to a large extent the Malay culture. These communities are referred to as *Chitti* (Indians), *Baba* (Chinese) and *Darah Keturunan Arab* or people of Arab descent, and *Eurasians* (Portuguese). By and large, before British intervention, the establishment of these small mixed blood communities in the port areas of Singapore, Malacca and Penang, did not change the overall homogeneous nature of the Malay population in the Malay Peninsular. But during their rule, the British brought in large numbers of Chinese and Indian immigrants to work in the colonial economy in Peninsular Malaya. This not only changed the nature of this society from a homogeneous one to a polyethnic society, but more importantly laid the structural foundations for the development and persistence of ethnicity in Malaysia.

The massive immigration of Chinese and Indians has been the chief cause for their population increase in Malaya up till the mid 1930's (Vlieland, 1934). Consequently, this not only

reduced the percentage of the Malay population but at a certain stage, ie. between 1921-1957, the population of the non-Malays exceeded that of the Malays (Sandhu, 1969: 41; Sidhu & Ahmad, 1978: 19). In fact, since 1921, statistical evidence shows that the indigenous Malay population was never an absolute majority. In 1921, the Malays had already been reduced to 54% of their population and in 1931 to 49.2%. In 1931, out of a population of 3,787,758, 1,575,448 were Malays, 1,281,611 Chinese and 572,613, Indians (Morrison, 1949:240). Since then, till 1970, the percentage of Malay population had never exceeded 54%. The provisional estimation of population in 1991 of Peninsular Malaysia shows a slight increase in the percentage of the Malays (58.2%), with the Chinese and Indians making up 41.1% of the population (Malaysia, 1992: 30).

The numerical strength of ethnic groups is one of the important elements in a multiethnic society, but ethnicity and its importance in Malaysia is also due to the historically inherited structural divisions that have made the political processes of ethnic group mobilisation and conflict much easier to perpetuate since colonial days. To understand the development of these ethnic institutions and the political mobilisation of ethnicity in Malaysia, we need first to understand the initial structuring of ethnic divisions that have taken place in the colonial period.

The Structuring of Ethnic Divisions

The modern 'race' or ethnic relations situation in Malaysia is a by-product of British colonialism (Abraham, 1983; Ahmad, 1968; Hirschman, 1986). As one scholar puts it '... the social and political inequalities moulded by colonial racial ideology were replicated and elaborated after independence because the structural blue print of colonial Malaya was not radically transformed upon the departure of the British' (Lee, 1990: 485). To understand the development of ethnic issues and the salience of ethnicity in current Malaysian society, one has first to grasp how, during the colonial period, segmentation along ethnic lines was structured among the major ethnic groups in the country. Among the most important initial social structuring that resulted in ethnic polarisation in the colonial period was economic functions and residential segregations.

From the beginning, the colonial British labour policy that favoured divisions of the labour force in Malaya produced the economic and spatial divisions among the Malays, Chinese and Indians. British officers were also committed to the pro-Malay policy by recruiting more Malays into the Malayan Civil Service. The traditional Malay rulers in the various states were preserved while colonial rule was administered indirectly via British residents. The colonial rule did not introduce any measures to integrate the Malays, Chinese and Indians in this new multiethnic society. The Chinese and

Indian immigrant groups were considered by their colonial masters as non-permanent settlers.

(i) Economic Segmentation

To develop the modern export-oriented economy during the colonial period, from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, the British brought in immigrant labour from South China and South India to work mainly in the tin mines and rubber plantations, respectively (Palmer, 1960; Blythe, 1947). As a consequence, three separate labour forces were established. Chinese labour was brought in mainly to work in the mining industry and the Indians mainly in the rubber plantations. The native Malays were not encouraged to participate in these newly expanding colonial economies, with the consequence that they remained mainly in the traditional subsistence agricultural sector.

The emergence of new urban areas as colonial administrative centres for the development of mining and plantation industries created an even greater difference in the occupations of the Malays, Chinese and Indians. In urban areas, the Chinese began their involvement in commercial activities, and the Indians were employed as labourers in the government departments like public works, the post and the railways. At the political and administrative levels, the British policy of safeguarding the interest of the Malays, besides recognising and maintaining their traditional Malay rulers, created a Malay administrative

group, a Malay elite, second only to the British colonialists, as well as the lower rank Malay clerical group (Khasnor, 1984; Ramasamy, 1993:218-220). In 1956, the Malay federal officers was 12,376 out of 27,315 officers as compared to 4,235 Indians, 6,165 Chinese, 766 Eurasians, 2,060 Europeans, 1,305 Ceylonese, and 108 others (Ramasamy, 1993: 220)

This pattern of an ethnically divided labour force is still evident in the post-independent period without significant changes in the distribution. Table 1.1 show the distribution of the Malay, Chinese and Indian labour forces in different occupational sectors in the year of independence (1957) and in 1970 when the first major socio-economic policy of 'restructuring society' was implemented through the New Economic Policy.

Analysing the Malaysian labour force divisions from the class perspective can overlook the occupational differences between the Malays and non-Malays. The occupational divisions between the Malays and non-Malays are a very strong feature that can prevent the development of strong class ties among them (Ali, 1991; Osman, 1983). Table 1.2 shows the internal divisions along ethnic lines that have arisen from the ethnic labour force concentration within the class structures of Malaysian society as described by Ali (1991: 103-104).

Table 1.1:

Occupation Groups by Ethnic Group, 1957-1985 (in per cent)

	1957		
	Malays	Chinese	Indians
Professional & Technical	2.1 (35.1)	3.3 (41.9)	2.4 (12.1)
Administrative & Managerial	0.4 (17.5)	2.0 (62.3)	1.0 (12.3)
Clerical	1.7 (27.1)	3.8 (46.2)	4.0 (19.9)
Sales	2.9 (15.9)	15.9 (66.1)	10.0 (16.8)
Service	7.3 (39.7)	8.0 (33.3)	7.6 (12.8)
Agricultural	74.2 (62.1)	38.3 (24.3)	50.2 (12.8)
Production	10.6 (26.5)	28.3 (53.5)	24.6 (18.9)
Total ('000)	1,023.7(48.2)	772.0(36.3)	313.0(14.7)

	1970		
	Malay	Chinese	Indian
Professional and technical	4.3 (47.0)	5.2 (39.5)	4.9 (10.8)
Administrative and managerial	0.5 (24.1)	1.9 (62.9)	0.8 (7.8)
Clerical	3.4 (35.4)	6.3 (45.9)	8.1 (17.2)
Sales	4.7 (26.7)	15.3 (61.7)	9.5 (11.1)
Service	6.8 (44.3)	8.6 (39.6)	10.9 (14.6)
Agricultural	62.3 (72.0)	21.1 (17.3)	41.0 (9.7)
Production	18.0 (34.2)	41.6 (55.9)	24.7 (9.6)
Total ('000)	1,477.6(51.8)	1,043.6(36.6)	301.4 (10.6)

Source: Sundaram, 1990: 82

Table 1.2: Class Structures and Ethnic Concentrations by Occupations in Malaysia

Class	Ethnic Composition
The Upper Class	
Nobility	Exclusively Malay
Leading government politicians and administrators	Mostly Malay
Successful capitalists, or businessmen	Mostly non-Malay
Successful professionals	Mostly Malay
The Middle Class	
Middle-range government, or public servants	Mostly Malay
Professionals	Mostly non-Malays
Businessmen, managers etc.	Mostly non-Malay
The Lower Class	
Peasantry	Mostly Malay
Government workers	Mostly Malay
Commercial and industrial workers	Mostly non-Malay

The division along ethnic lines in the labour force has been an influential factor in sharpening ethnic consciousness and conflicts between the Malays and non-Malays in Malaysia since the colonial period. Although the Malays have made rapid progress in various occupational sectors following the Government's New Economic Policy (see Table 1.3 for comparison), the broad generalization of the division of labour along ethnic lines undoubtedly has a strong basis.

In the rural areas, the Malays are predominantly agricultural smallholders whose main activities involve the cultivation of paddy, rubber tapping and fishing. The Chinese are involved in vegetable farming as well as rubber tapping, while the Indians work in the rubber and oil palm plantations. In the urban areas, the Malays form the main labour force in government administration, the armed forces

Table 1.3: Occupational Groups by Ethnic Group for the Years 1970 and 1990 (%)

	Malays		Chinese		Indians	
	1970	1990	1970	1990	1970	1990
Professional & Technical	47.0	60.3	39.5	30.8	10.8	7.7
Administrative & Managerial	24.1	33.3	62.9	58.7	7.8	5.3
Clerical	35.4	54.9	45.9	36.9	17.2	7.8
Sales	26.7	36.0	61.7	56.5	11.1	6.5
Service	44.3	61.5	39.6	27.0	14.6	10.6
Agricultural	72.0	76.4	21.2	15.8	9.7	7.0
Production	34.2	48.5	55.9	40.4	9.6	10.7
Total	51.8	57.8	36.6	32.9	10.6	8.5

Source: Sundaram, 1990: 82-83; Malaysia, 1991 :34.

and at the ministerial levels. Occupations related to labouring and management in manufacturing, construction and commerce are mainly in the hands of the non-Malays, chiefly the Chinese. The Chinese and Indians are also predominant in the professional occupations notably in the medical, technical and legal services. This is due to the better and early educational opportunities for the Chinese and Indians in the urban areas. The Malay and non-Malay labour force is also widely segmented between the governmental and non-governmental sectors, respectively.

The economic inequalities among the ethnic groups are quite extensive (Snodgrass, 1980; Anand, 1983). The division of employment along ethnic lines has resulted in the unequal distribution of income, ownership of wealth and poverty

among the ethnic groups and more importantly with regards to the Malay/non-Malay division. This is because more non-Malays than Malays are involved in the modern, export-oriented, and private economic sectors. These sectors have a relatively higher income and capital generating capacity than the rural traditional economy and government sectors, in which more Malays than non-Malays are involved.

It is not surprising if the vast economic differences between the Malays and non-Malays are interpreted as comparable to class differences. But as clarified by Husin Ali, who uses this class perspective, '... in each class there are Chinese, Malays, Indian, etc., although they may be concentrated in different economic functions. Thus, the system is not based on ethnic stratification, where only one particularly ethnic group makes up a particular class' (Ali, 1991: 105). On the other hand, there seems to be no indication of any strong class solidarity across ethnic lines that can undermine ethnic influence (Ali, 1991; Osman, 1983). There is even a strong tendency for class interests to become muted by perception of ethnic differences (Nagata, 1975; Ackerman, 1985). For example, as Ali writes (1991: 115):

> *The problem of poverty in Malaysia is actually of a class nature, but very often it is presented as a racial or ethnic one. The plight of the majority of poor Malays is compared to by some politicians in government, as well as those in the opposition, to the relative affluence among the Chinese businessmen in towns. Some of these politicians, ... raise this issue in order to gain mass support or sympathy. They tend to blame the plight of the*

Malays on non-Malays. Thus, genuine economic problems are often given a racial twist.

The higher incidence of poverty among Malays in the rural, agricultural sector has always been a striking feature that has been compared with the success of the Chinese in the urban, modern economic sector (Nash, 1989: 40; Ali, 1991:115). As a consequence, the economic inequalities, between the Malays and the non-Malays have been viewed in both ethnic and class terms among the majority of the Malays. As Nash puts it '... in the folk version of social structure, at least in the Malay native or native model of wealth, Malays are poor, Chinese are rich, and this economic fact is one and the same thing. Malay poverty and Chinese wealth are the same social fact' (Nash, 1989: 41). This forms the basis for the articulation of ethnic nationalistic sentiment and radicalism among the Malays that has been a strong motivational and driving political force behind the Malays' struggle to implement more vigorous economic policies and strategies to correct the economic imbalance.

(ii) Residential Segregation

From the beginning, because of their involvement in different economic functions, the Malays, Chinese and Indians also lived in different areas (Sidhu, 1976: 18). The development of modern economic sectors and urban centres started in the West Coast states of Peninsular Malaysia owing to the expansion of rubber plantations and tin mining during the period of colonial rule. Many of the Chinese and

Indians who initially came as labourers to take part in these major economic activities have been living mainly in these areas since then. The Malays, on the other hand, continue to be the dominant group in the East Coast states and rural areas (Sidhu & Ahmad, 1978: 22-25).

The striking feature between the Malays and non-Malays, in terms of residential segregation, is that the Malays are much less urbanised than the non-Malays. Only about 30% of the Malays live in these urban areas, compared to 59.2% of the Chinese and 43.5% of the Indians (Malaysia, 1986: 134-135). The urban Malay proportion at an earlier stage was even lower. In 1921, only 6.7% of the Malays were living in the urban areas, above the size of 1,000 persons. In 1931, it was 8.6%, and in 1947, it was 11.3%. The urban Malay population was 27.6% of the total urban population in 1970 (Sidhu and Ahmad, 1978: 25-26).

Ethnically dominated residential areas can be found in both rural and urban areas. Rural Malays live in their own traditional villages called *kampung*[2]. The traditional Malay villages are located mainly in inland paddy growing areas and coastal fishing areas. Rural Chinese areas mainly developed surrounding the mining and vegetable growing areas. But at a later stage, Chinese villages called *new villages* were created under the British resettlement

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2 One of the reasons for this largely rice-growing area to become a Malay dominated area is the legal protection given to it since 1931 by the Malay Reservation Enactments which forbids non-Malays buying Malay land freely (Tregonning, 1964).

programme during the period of the 'emergency' to prevent the rural Chinese from giving support to the Communist cause in Malaya (Means, 1976:118-120; Sandhu, 1964)[3]. The Indians live in the areas of rubber and oil palm plantations which are commonly referred to as *estates*.

In the urban areas too, Chinese, Malays and Indians have formed their own ethnically dominated residential areas (Lee, 1976). More Malay dominated areas in the urban centres were the result of rapid rural-urban migration among the Malays in the post-Independence period, particularly since 1970, with the launching of the government plan for greater urbanisation and modernisation among the Malay population. Residential areas of ethnic concentration in many Malaysian cities and towns are more prominent among the lower strata of urban population as a result of the rapid migration of rural Malays and Indians seeking jobs in the expanding job markets and industries in urban centres. Squatter areas in cities like Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya are examples of ethnic residential areas of lower class urban population. As well as the ethnically concentrated working class areas, the development of new and modern housing estates has attracted a greater mixture of ethnic population from middle and upper class backgrounds. One of the factors that contributes to greater ethnic mixture in these areas is the government rule for developers of housing estates to allocate a certain

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3 In 1951, about 400,000 rural Chinese were resettled in the new villages, and by 1954 it had increased to about 600,000 in 410 new villages (Means, 1976: 128n).

percentage of the new houses, with a discount rate (15%), solely for the Malays.

The initial ethnic structuring of labour force concentrations in separate economic activities and spatial separation has become one basis for ethnic group mobilisation processes. With the absence of a central structure under colonial rule to facilitate integration, the Malays, Chinese and Indians established their own separate ethnic, political, economical and educational organisations, and these endure in the socio-cultural differences and ethnic identities of contemporary Malaysia. Through the initial structuring of ethnic divisions during the colonial period, ethnic boundaries and social distances between the Malays, Chinese and Indians have been strengthened and consequently perpetuated.

These forms of segregation offer very little opportunity for the Malays, Chinese and Indians to interact socially (Nagata, 1975: 118). The situation did not improve very much in the post-Independence period, despite government policies and strategies for national unity. At the micro-level, although some increase in interethnic interactions was observed, this did not, however, lead greatly to wider interethnic interpersonal networks of friendship and contacts between the ethnic groups (Lee, 1977; 1978; Rabushka, 1969). Among the other factors that maintain the social distance and reinforce cultural definitions of ethnicity are endogamous marriages, religion, language,

family and kinship relations within each ethnic group. The cultural differences between the Malays, Chinese and Indians form another basis for the development, and survival of ethnic politics in Malaysia.

Cultural and Ethnic Identity

One of the factors that gives a kind of 'natural' or primordial strength to the reinforcement of group solidarity among the Malays, Chinese and Indians, and the spontaneous ethnic consciousness of their members, is their inherited 'traditional' culture. These markers of ethnic boundaries are not only expressed in the highly visible ways in the cultural practices of customs, religions and languages spoken, but also in their values and ideological preferences (Nash, 1989; Taib & Ismail, 1982: 108-119). Above all in Malaysia, the importance of cultural and religious divisions and identity among ethnic groups are politically mobilised.

The Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia are, however, not homogeneous groups. Hirshman's (1987) analysis of the development of ethnic classification in the censuses from 1871 to 1980 clearly shows the existence of internal differentiations within the Malay, Chinese and Indian groups. These differentiations are mainly based on the linguistic and regional variations within the broader form of ethnic cultural similarity. British colonisation provided the first historical setting in Malaysia to enhance the political process of ethnic category-making and creation

of ethnic identity among the Malays, Chinese and Indians. The colonial situation provided the political context for the emergence of ethnic solidarity and movements among these divided groups of Malays, Chinese and Indians. As Horowitz notes, 'Within several decades, however - and certainly by end of World War II - strong, coherent Malay and Chinese *(also Indian)* identities had, for most purpose, superseded these lesser loyalties (internal divisions). This development was prompted by the juxtaposition of these groups throughout most of the Malay Peninsula' (1975:128).

Before colonial intervention, as one scholar observed, 'Malay society was thus far removed from abstract notions of nationalism and economic development. The Malay peasant only dimly perceived that he belonged to a wider world than the village community' (Jesudason, 1990: 26). Nagata wrote, 'The modern term *Malay*, used in its grossest form in opposition to *non-Malays* (usually Chinese and Indian), obscures a whole host of internal differentiations arising from their history. For the category of Malay has been built up by a gradual series of aggregations from a variety of other peoples who still sometimes assert their separate identity (1981: 103). The Malay population in Malaysia, apart from the Malays themselves, also includes various groups of people from different parts of Indonesia (Ramsay, 1956; Nagata, 1981). Among those of Indonesian origin are the Javanese, Minangkabau, Bugis, Boyanese and Banjarese. One common factor among them, however, is their religion. They are followers of the Muslim religion. Although the Malays in

the different states may have shared greater cultural and religious similarities, they were politically not a self-aware unified ethnic group under the traditional indigenous political system before British intervention. This regional-based division still exists to some degree among the Malays of the different states in the current Malaysia.

In Malaysia today, the Malays are considered the indigenous people. In their struggle to establish their indigenous status and political and economic rights, the mobilisation of solidarity among the various indigenous groups has become an important political strategy in order to differentiate themselves from the Chinese and Indians immigrants. The presence of the Chinese and Indians in Malaysia during British rule, created the demand for political unification between the Malays and the other ethnic groups of Indonesian origin, as well as among the Malays from the different states within the Malay peninsular. As Nagata observed, while they may maintain the 'local recognition of different types of 'Malays'... Javanese, Bugis, and so forth (they) do not hesitate to identify as Malays, which they justify on the basis of common *bangsa* (race), when certain political economic privileges are at stake' (1981: 105).

As a consequence, the Malays and other small linguistic groups of Indonesian origin mainly the Javanese, Minangkabau and Bugis who have inhabited Peninsular Malaya for a long time, have politically identified themselves as Malays and *'Bumiputra'* (sons of the soil). The search for a common

identity as a Malay between the main Malay-speaking and other linguistic groups of Indonesian origin was never a problem, since they shared the same religion (Islam) and to a large extent the same cultural values (Ramsay, 1956). The other factor that made the mutual acceptance of a common Malay ethnic identity much easier was probably the fact that the local Indonesians had played a very important role in the traditional political system of Malaya before British intervention (Gullick, 1969).

There are other native people in Malaysia who are not considered as Malays. These include the other natives like the 'Orang Asli' in Peninsular Malaysia and the Dayak, Dusun, Iban and Kadazan in the states of Sabah and Sarawak. Because of their cultural dissimilarities from the Malays, particularly those who are not Muslims, they are not considered Malays, although they have been granted the status of *'bumiputra'*.

The Chinese and the Indians, too, are divided linguistically, and to some extent, culturally (Arasaratnam, 1970; Purcell, 1960; 1978). Among the Chinese, there are groups who come from different provinces of China, speaking different dialects like Hokkein, Cantonese, Teochew, Hainanese and Hakka. Among the Indians, there are different linguistic groups like Tamils, Malayalees, Punjabis, including Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis and Pakistanis. Whereas Islam is the unifying factor for the Malays, the Chinese and Indians do not have a common religion. A small proportion of

Chinese and Indians are also Muslims but the majority of them are not. The Chinese are mainly followers of 'Chinese religion' which encompasses the element of beliefs and practices of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and ancestral worship (Ting, 1980: 89-90). Indians are mainly Hindus, and Sikh (Rajoo, 1975). A small proportion of these non-Muslim Chinese and Indians now also share common religious beliefs and practices through Christianity, Buddhism, Bahaism, and the neo-Hindu Sai Baba spiritual movement (Lee, 1982: 136).

It is vital not to overlook the vast cultural and religious differences that exist between the Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia. It is not surprising to note that in some instances, these differences can prevent the development of close relations among members of these ethnic groups. The most important among these differences is religion. For the Malays, their religious practice has always been considered an important and serious matter in their community life and in their relations with non-Muslims. In simple everyday interactions, the Muslim religious code of practice could also limit, and put a strain on, relations between individuals and the families of Malays and non-Malays (Nash, 1989:36). For instance, as one commentator rightly observes, 'Muslim proscriptions on eating pork and keeping dogs may seem rather insignificant to non-Malaysians. But in reality they are central emblems of ethnic divisions. Malays regard both as deeply polluting, whereas Chinese either ignore Malay attitudes or respond even more assertively by clinging to these ethnic symbols'

(Basham, 1983: 74). Another symbol of social distance is beef. Among the Malays, beef is their favourite meat but it is totally rejected by the Hindus who consider the cow as a sacred animal. By and large, one can say that religious taboos within each group do pose some constraints on the Malay and non-Malay groups mixing freely, by going out for a meal or an outing together in informal social gatherings.

Religious divisions, mainly between the all-Muslim characteristic of the Malays and the overwhelming non-Muslim characteristic of the Chinese and the Indians, have also strengthened their ethnic groups' boundary maintenance mechanism through the practice of endogamy. Mixed marriages, between the Malays and non-Muslim non-Malays, rarely happen because of the compulsory conversion of the non-Muslims to the Islamic faith in order to marry the Malays. This is rare because of '... the high social and cultural costs and dislocations it entails', as Nash puts it (1989:36).

Regardless of the internal differences, the solidarity that exists within the Malays, Chinese and Indians as politically distinct ethnic groups, is an important fact in Malaysian politics. The divisions are not in any way seen as weakening the ethnic group consciousness and identification. Their internal differences may be completely ignored when these groups come to face each other on important ethnic issues. As Wilson observes, 'in any relation involving non-Malays, the Malays will ignore their internal differences and become one in their opposition towards non-Malays' (1967: 23).

Similarly, the Chinese and Indians will ignore their internal differences and even the difference between them to show a greater unity as 'non-Malays' in their opposition with the Malays. The underlying reason for such ethnic group mobilisation to take place in the form of Malays versus non-Malays is the very political definition of Malay ethnicity.

Malay ethnicity and the Malays' entitlement to special rights as *Bumiputra* (sons of the soil) is constitutionally defined in Malaysia. The Malaysian Constitution defines a Malay as 'a person who professes the Muslim religion, speaks Malay, conforms to Malay customs', (Article 162 [2]: 124). In addition to this, the Malay language and Islam have also been granted the status of official language and religion of the state. This very political definition of 'Malays', their language and religion in the Constitution has further reinforced the importance of cultural-religious definition of ethnicity between the Malays and non-Malay groups. Cultural and religious differences between the Malays and non-Malays have become politically significant symbols of ethnic identity in Malaysia (Ratnam, 1965: 3).

Since the Malays are constitutionally defined, the Chinese and Indians have automatically formed the other political category as 'non-Malays'. The division which is again synonymous with *bumipitra*/non-*bumiputra* division, runs parallel to Muslim/non-Muslim division. For the Malays and non-Malays, all these overlapping identities are politically

important in their relations and demands against each other.

For Malays, as Means puts it,

> *The categories **Malay**, **Bumiputra**, and **Muslim** are not quite contiguous but do overlap to a very large extent. ... Which of these three categories is stressed for political mobilization is a matter of shifting strategies and alliances. Each category is energized by a different set of emotive symbols of identity as well as by different issues of public policy that highlight and make salient that constituency. ... Thus there is a continuous interplay between the themes of ethnicity and culture, of **indigenousness**, and of religion in the discourse of politics (Means, 1991: 123).*

Ethnic Institutional Support

In addition to their traditional cultural, social and religious activities, at the institutional level, two most important organisations that provided opportunities for group mobilisation and further ethnic divisions were established. These were ethnic schools and political parties. Without alternative central structures, these ethnic organisational developments became crucial in providing social services for individual ethnic communities. Thus, these became mechanisms for maintaining and fostering ethnic culture, sense of ethnic identity and ethnic allegiance.

The development of vernacular schools - Malay, Chinese and Tamil - during the colonial period was among one of the important types of institutional segregation of ethnic groups. These separate schools were established to ensure the survival of ethnic languages, as well as ethnic cultural

values, practices and early socialisation. During this period, English schools were established in urban areas as a common school for all. It did not, however, appeal to the Malays to send their children because the majority of them lived in the rural areas. Apart from this, being Muslims, they found these mostly Christian missionary schools not suitable for them (Hashim, 1983: 17-18).

After Independence, under the National Education Policy, Malay schools took over the position as common schools for Malaysians by being conceded the status as national schools. The Malay language was granted the status of national and official language, and subsequently called *Bahasa Malaysia* to symbolise national unity. Malay was made a compulsory language to be taught in all schools, including the Chinese and Tamil primary schools which continued to survive. As a consequence, compared to the earlier generation, children of the new generation of non-Malays now have learnt, and can speak, fluently the Malay language. Since the implementation of the National Educational Policy, the question of language in the Malaysian education system has been one of the most sensitive political issues between Malays and non-Malays (Lee, 1980; Roff, 1967; Saad, 1981; Ward and Hewstone, 1985).

Among non-Malays, mainly the Chinese, the implementation of this policy of using Malay as the sole national and official language of the country, is considered a clear-cut strategy by the Malay-dominated government to weaken and undermine

the political right of the non-Malays to preserve their mother tongue and culture. The policy is seen as setting up a dead end to their ideal aspirations for their ethnic languages to be accorded the status of official language and for the expansion of their own ethnic educational institutions, like the proposal by the Chinese for the *Merdeka University*. The issue of language and education among the non-Malays, chiefly that of the Chinese, still continues to be a sensitive political agenda that can create a 'big event' of ethnic tension, to use Blumer's term (1958: 6), in Malaysian politics (Lee, 1980).

It has been argued that the political sphere is the most dominant and expressive dimension of ethnicity in any modern multi-ethnic society (Smith, 1979; 1981). In modern society, people become more aware of the importance of mobilisation of ethnic group consciousness, solidarity and ethnic identity as the most effective political instrument for applying pressure for defense of social, economic and political interests. In Malaysia, this has been the case since the colonial period (Enloe, 1970; Hirschman, 1975; Ratnam, 1965). Each ethnic group formed its own political organisation to pursue its group interests. In this form of communal politics, the mobilisation of ethnic consciousness is a crucial factor in developing the salience of ethnicity and one that has influenced the way in which ethnic relations have taken shape.

Divided ethnic group mobilisation in Malaysia could be said to have emerged with the separate political activities among the Malays, Chinese and Indians in the pre-war period. This period witnessed the emergence of communal political organisations in the first phase of Malay, Chinese and Indian nationalism (Silcock & Aziz, 1953; Roff, 1967). In this period, the Malays' nationalist movement, which was inspired by nationalism in the Middle East and Indonesia, concentrated on religious reformation as a basis for their political awakening and Malay ethnic group identity (Soenarno, 1960). On the other hand, the Chinese and Indian nationalist movements in Malaya were influenced by nationalism and reflected the events in their country of origin (Arasaratnam, 1970; Purcell, 1978; Wang, 1970). Political interests and activities in Malaya from the 1900s to the 1930s did not have much direct effect on ethnic relations among the national groups. Nonetheless, as one scholar describes, 'Although British intervention determined to a large extent the structure of ethnic relation, the growth of separate ethnic nationalism also contributed to the maintenance of colonial racial ideology' (Lee, 1990: 485).

Throughout the stages of nationalism before Independence, the socio-political interests of the Malays have been mobilised via important organisations like the *Kaum Muda* (Young Generation Movement), *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (Young Malays' Union), *Pembela Tanah Air* (*PETA* or Defenders of the Homeland), *Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung* (*KRIS* or

Union of Peninsular Indonesians), *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu* (Malay Nationalist Party), *Pertubuhan Kebangsaan Melayu Bersatu* (United Malay National Organisation or UMNO) and *Parti Islam Sa Malaysia* (*PAS* or Pan Malayan Islamic Party). The political activities of the Chinese were mobilised through The Chinese Kuomintang, the Malayan Communist Party and Malayan/Malaysian Chinese Association or MCA. As for the Indians, they were mobilised through the Central Indian Association, Indian Independence League of Malaya and the Malayan/Malaysian Indian Congress or MIC.

The formation of these communal political or semi-political organisations gave very little opportunity for any sort of political cooperation among the Malays, Chinese and Indians till the early 1950s, although mutual anti-colonial feelings were expressed among them. Generally, there was no sense of a common political community. Among the other reasons, in terms of political status and rights, in the pre-war period the colonial British treated the Malays as a special group, for they had ruled Malaya through treaties with the Malay aristocracy. This practice has been formalised since 1953 (Means, 1976: 25n). The Chinese and Indians were treated as non-permanent settlers in Malaya. The most important reason is that the Malays also felt threatened by the non-Malays, particularly by the Chinese advancement in the economy, and because of their strong support for the Communist struggle in Malaya. The Malays perceived this as a threat to their political rights and privileges as natives of Malaya. As one Malay writer puts it, there was a '... fear of alien

(Chinese and Indian) encroachment into their land, the *Tanah Melayu*, or the *Land of the Malays*' (Hashim, 1983: 2).

Ethnic relations between the Chinese and the Malays became seriously strained during the Japanese Occupation in the 1940s. This was because the Japanese, in their attempt to persecute the Chinese for their moral and material support to the Chinese nationalists in the Sino-Japanese war, had used para-military units that were mainly composed of Malays to fight the Chinese led Communist Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA). As a consequence, there were other follow-up open ethnic clashes between the Malays and Chinese just before the Japanese surrender, and the return of British forces (Wahid, 1970a; Cheah, 1979, 1981).

The feeling of animosity between the Malays and Chinese again intensified during the period of *emergency* when the Malay armed forces clashed repeatedly with the Chinese communist guerrillas. As Means has commented, 'Although the war was never defined in racial terms by either side, it did complicate the problems of developing communal harmony and understanding.... Inter communal tensions increased when Malay communities responded to guerrilla terrorism by retaliatory attacks against neighbouring Chinese' (1976: 118-119). Andaya and Andaya wrote that 'The communal violence of the post-war years can thus be regarded as a logical outcome of divisive ethnic policies and attitude which had developed gradually over the period of colonial rule. ... The implications of the post-war violence were not

lost on the people of Malaya. While Independence was a desirable goal, there were some who expressed doubts that any independent Malayan government would be able to restrain ethnic enmities once the mediating hand of the colonial power had been removed' (1982: 253).

Matters of citizenship and political rights were the most crucial issues that evoked direct political conflict between ethnic groups in Malaysia (Allen, 1967; Tadin, 1960). The solidarity of the Malays against the non-Malays was strongly expressed through their total rejection of the proposal of the Malayan Union Constitution by the British government with the intention of returning independence to Malaya. The Malayan Union's idea of giving equal rights to all citizens was clearly not acceptable to the Malays. Historically, the country was (and is still) considered by the Malays as belonging to them and sharing equal citizenship rights with non-Malays is seen as taking away their indigenous rights and sharing in the country. Recognising this fact, during the colonial period, the British showed a commitment towards the pro-Malay policy by maintaining the traditional Malay rulers and special rights of the Malays in politics and the administration of the country.

Strong objections to the Malayan Union were expressed by the Malays through UMNO. They fought back to establish their special rights and privileges constitutionally. The colonial rule was left without much choice but to revoke the plan. The Malayan Union was substituted with a new constitution of

the Federation of Malaya. This new constitution enshrined the legal basis for Malay hegemony. On the other hand, strict measures were imposed on the matter of giving citizenship to non-Malays (Wahid, 1970b: 115-116). Thus politically, a dominant division between Malays and non-Malays was structured in the form of Malay indigenousness versus non-Malay non-indigenouness.

Malay Hegemony, Riot and Ethnic Preferential Policies

Since the proposal of the Malayan Union, the constitutional matters of common nationality and special positions that represent conflicting aspirations of the Malays and the non-Malays have become the central issue in Malaysian ethnic politics. Divided ethnic nationalism, political aspirations and conflict have undoubtedly accentuated strong ethnic group consciousness, distrust and feelings of insecurity among the Malays and non-Malays in the post-Independence period. The past experience has become a hindrance in forging a new Malayan unity and national consciousness among the three major ethnic groups. In the post-Independence period, Malay hegemony has made itself the new political force that has influenced the rise of ethnic salience and allegiance in Malaysian society.

The formation of the Alliance *(Perikatan)*, the coalition party between UMNO, MCA and MIC, indicated in one way or the other, the acceptance by the leaders of the non-Malays of Malay supremacy in Malaysian politics. This was later

adopted into the Constitution of Independent Malaya of 1957. The 'bargaining' process which brought about a compromise among the communal leaders at this stage followed the pragmatic approach among the leaders of the Alliance to solve the Malay/non-Malay dispute by trading the special rights of the Malays for the citizenship by *jus soli* of the non-Malays. But the dispute between the principle of 'common nationality' and the 'special position' was a pressing one. While the cooperation among the ethnic leaders of the major political parties led to Independence, this cooperation could not be perceived as having received wider social consensus within the individual communities for the above reason. The controversy surrounding these two issues was reflected by Means as follows,

> *The Reid Commission found it impossible to reconcile two principles in its terms of reference: providing for 'a common nationality' and 'safeguarding the special position of the Malays'. The first principle presumed the equality of all citizens, while the second implied the creation of separate rights for two classes of citizens. The Commission expressed its preference for the principle of equality, but it also acknowledged that the Malays would suffer if special privileges were suddenly withdrawn. To resolve the contradictions, the Commission did not give Malay special rights constitutional status; rather, it allowed the system to continue by law, thus permitting termination or diminution by legislative enactment. The Commission's most controversial proposal provides that Malay special privileges would be continued 'for a substantial period, but that in due course the present preferences should be reduced and should ultimately cease'. Accordingly, the Commission recommended that the existing Malay privileges be reviewed fifteen years after Independence with the objective of preparing for their eventual abolition' (1976: 173-179; 1986: 101).*

Article 153 of the Federal Constitution on the Malays Special Privileges ensures the reservation of quotas for the

Malays in public services, granting licences or permits for business and in scholarships. Regardless of the general agreement and assurance given by the leaders of the Alliance on the temporary nature of the Malays' special privilege (Heng, 1988: 222; Malaya, 1957: 183; Ratnam, 1965: 102-117), this term was not included in the constitution of 1957. While this may have caused contradictory expectations between the Malays and non-Malays, the compromise or the 'bargain', notably the Special Privilege of the Malays, has been regarded after Independence by the Malays as a law, a binding contract that applies to all for all times (Chee, 1991: 6; Nawawi, 1990). Chee wrote, 'The prospects for the plural-ethnic democracy that was inaugurated on 31 August 1957 would hence hinge on the maintenance of the ethnic security equilibrium between the inherently conflicting requirements of Malay 'special position' and non-Malay 'legitimate interests' (1991: 6). In fact, experience shows that it is not always easy to maintain such an equilibrium without conflict, or without applying authoritarian political measures to suppress it.

Malaysia had experienced ethnic clashes before independence in 1957. In the post-Independence period, the year 1969 was undoubtedly a major landmark and turning point in the history of Malaysian politics and ethnic relations. Ethnic violence erupted again in this year (Goh, 1971; Gagliano, 1970; Parker, 1979). This incident occurred because of the dissatisfaction and frustration among both the Malays and non-Malays. Despite the special rights of the Malays, even

after more than ten years of Independence, the Malays had not really achieved any significant progress in the economy, in reducing the inter-ethnic economic gap. In a retrospective view on the frustrations of the Malays before the riots, Mahathir Mohamad, who is currently the Prime Minister of Malaysia, explained, '... although the Malays have managed to enter the economic field, they have never been able to, and can never hope to catch up with the Chinese. Even as Independence brought the Malays increased opportunities, it has brought the Chinese even greater opportunities which have propelled them so far ahead as to make the entry of the Malays into business almost ridiculously insignificant. The Malay economic dilemma is still unsolved and seems likely to remain so. The Malays' feeling of frustration continues to deepen' (1970: 51).

For non-Malays', the institutionalisation of the Malays' special rights in the Malaysian constitution was a political blow. The political cooperation of the non-Malay leaders with UMNO of the Malays in forming the Alliance party and the government, could not stop the accumulation of political frustrations among the non-Malays, chiefly the Chinese, the second largest ethnic group, with more previous experiences of ethnic clashes and political radicalism that represented their animosity towards the Malays. In addition to this, in the 1960s, there was also a fear among the non-Malays of losing their cultural identity, following the efforts of the Malay dominated government to establish the Malay tongue as the sole official and national language. The Chinese and

Indians, the MCA and MIC, despite being members in the ruling coalition, were not able to ensure the preservation of their ethnic cultural identity.

For the first time after Independence, the non-Malays, particularly the Chinese, took the opportunity to express their political frustrations in the 1969 general elections by backing the non-Malays' opposition parties. In the elections, although the Alliance held the majority of seats in the *Dewan Rakyat* (House of Representatives), compared to the previous elections in 1964, the number of seats had been reduced from 89 to 66 or from 58.4% to 48.8% in the popular vote. The non-Malay opposition parties - *Gerakan*, Democratic Action Party (DAP) and People's Progressive Party (PPP) - together won a total of 22 seats, the Pan Malayan Islamic Party (PAS) won 12 seats, thus depriving the Alliance Government of the two-thirds majority. The Chinese even went to the extent of celebrating the victory of the opposition in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur with various outrageous slogans like 'Malays may return to their villages', 'Kuala Lumpur now belongs to the Chinese', 'We'll thrash you, we are now powerful', 'This country does not belong to the Malays, we want to chase out the Malays' (Goh, 1971; Malaysia, 1969). As for the Malays, Goh wrote, 'They felt outraged that they, the natives of the soil, should have been asked to withdraw from Kuala Lumpur, the capital of *Tanah Melayu* (the Land of the Malays) into Red-Indian-style reservations so that the immigrant community could gain

domination over it' (1971: 21). The anger of the Malays exploded into several days of rioting.

On the significance of this event for the Malays, Lee explained, that it has become

> *... ingrained as a collective symbol of the political sanctity of Malay nationalism. ...the 13 May incident presaged an era of Bumiputrasim[4] in which the symbol of Malay struggle ... was consolidated in the form of NEP (New Economic Policy).... the 13 May incident has transcended the actual event to become an ideological instrument of the states, being a powerful symbolic code for protecting Malay nationalism and curbing non-Malay assertiveness' (1990: 491-493). For the non-Malays, especially the Chinese, he further explains, '... the 13 May incident seemingly spelled the end of their attempt at political self-determination. Without strong, consistent nationalist ideologies reinforced by military power, the electoral victory was a Pyrrhic one that exposed their weaknesses in political organisation (1990: 492).*

The 1969 riots could have been perceived by the Malays as a blessing in disguise. The incident made it possible for the first time after Independence, for the Malays to reactivate and rationalise their political hegemony through the political ideology of *Bumiputraism* that is derived from the special rights of the Malays as *Bumiputra* (Sons of the Soil). This became a central driving force for the Malay-dominated government for formulating and implementing ethnic preferential policies that were to promote Malay economy and culture.

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4 An ideology based on the Malays' rights/status as sons of the soil.

The political economic strategy to modernise the Malays and to improve their participation in the Malaysian economy, as well as to establish the Malay national identity, has been of paramount importance to them. The robust manner in which these policies, primarily the New Economic Policy (NEP), were implemented has even overshadowed other strategies like the *Rukunegara*, for national unity (Means, 1991: 23). The national ideology which was also implemented after riots is in fact a kind of formal declaration of inter-ethnic bargaining (Means, 1991: 13). The Ministry of Unity, which was established after the riots, did not seem to have a vital role to play in the society, as the status of this ministry was later reduced to a *board* for national unity before being 'demoted' to just a *department*. Regardless of its less important status to that of the NEP, the *Rukunegara* nevertheless represents a symbol of Malay political hegemony through some of its principles, including loyalty to the king and upholding the constitution.

The important tool in implementing Malay economic and cultural policies is, however, the Sedition Act. This Act prohibits public or even parliamentary questioning on constitutional matters that are regarded as 'sensitive issues'. These issues include the sovereignty of the Malay rulers. Safeguarding the Malay rulers is politically very significant since they symbolically represent the Malays' exclusive historical link with the country. Others are the Malays' special privilege, status of Malay as the sole official and national language, status of Islam as the

official religion, and the citizenship rights of non-Malays. As one scholar explains, 'This amendment implies, *inter alia*, restriction of the democratic process and indirectly assures continued Malay political control' (Hashim, 1983: 93). The government may also prohibit any other ethnically controversial issues if the government perceives it can directly, or indirectly challenge political stability. In 1987, when the issue of Chinese education almost threw the country into another riot, massive detention was carried out to stop the eruption of another conflict in the country.

New Economic Policy and Ethnic Relations

The Malays' economic nationalism has been the most significant driving force in the Malay political mobilisation after independence. Uneven development and modernisation between the Malays and non-Malays were the major concerns for which the New Economic Policy was implemented immediately after the 1969 riot. The development of Malay economic power and modernisation was seen as vital in securing interethnic harmony in the society. Greater participation of the Malays in modern economic sectors, educational and training programmes and urbanisation processes was the aim of the policy.

The New Economic Policy (NEP) that was introduced in 1970 stipulates that 'within a period of twenty years (by 1990), the Malays and other indigenous people will manage and own at least 30% of the total commercial and industrial

activities in all categories and scales of operation' (Malaysia, 1971: 41). This objective is central to the strategy of restructuring Malaysian society and eventually eradicating poverty to bring inter-ethnic peace and social justice. The NEP as such is not an economic policy *per se*, but an overall policy of socio-economy and politics. Its implementation has resulted in greater state intervention in exercising a favourable increase in the intake, or quotas, for Malays in government employment, in educational training programmes, and in the private sectors of the economy. To increase the Malays' ownership of the Malaysian economy, to achieve 30% of share equity by 1990, public enterprises were expected to act as *Bumiputra* Trust Agencies to buy corporate shares and to acquire control of industries on behalf of the Malays.

As a consequence, more public enterprises at the federal, state and regional levels were established. By 1986, there were 841 such enterprises at all levels, mostly established in the 1970s (Ibrahim, 1987). The Public Services Commission and other public agencies have directly recruited a high proportion of Malays in the government services. According to one calculation, as quoted by Means, between 1969 and 1973, Malay intake in the government services, including the armed forces, was 99% of the total intake (1991: 26). To increase the participation of Malays in the private sectors, the government rule requires all private firms to ensure that the intake of Malays is at least 32% to 45%, and

compels them to include them in their training and promotional schemes.

In order to increase the Malays' participation in the modern sectors of the economy, the NEP has brought about favourable Malay quotas for scholarships and admissions, either to study in the local universities or overseas, including specific courses of studies. In addition to the existing University of Malaya, more universities have been opened to accommodate this policy, where Malay students form between 65% and 90% of the total student population (Means, 1991: 26). Means adds, 'In addition, large numbers of government scholarship were made available for advanced study abroad, with over 90% of these foreign study scholarships being awarded to Malays. By contrast most non-Malays who studied abroad have to do so on their own resource. By 1982, there were 50,000 Malaysian students pursuing education abroad, ... with almost all the overseas Malay students fully funded by the government. All these programmes of assistance to the Malays were planned as part of the overall NEP strategy' (1991: 26).

Cultural Policies

In addition to this economic strategy, there were also cultural strategies that were consistent with Malay nationalism. As one scholar observed, 'For the Malays, the changes brought by colonialism had a major imprint on their psyche. The experience of external domination weakened their

collective self-confidence and drove them, particularly the second generation post-Independence Malay elite and intelligentsia, to recover this loss in the symbolic, political, and economic spheres' (Jesudason, 1990: 29).

Apart from securing political hegemony and the economic policy to promote their economic development, the Malays were also concerned for the position of their own culture in relation to the development of national culture and national identity. Probably what concerned the Malays culturally was the domination of the English language, and the presence of the competing Chinese and Tamil schools. Even before 1969, the 1950 National Educational Policy and the 1967 National Language Act were already enforced to promote Malay schools and the Malay language. The concept of 'Malaysian Malaysia' in the 1960s as advocated by some radical non-Malay leaders was not acceptable to the Malays. The idea was based on the liberal political approach, and it saw Malaysia as a country with equal rights for all its citizens. This idea was not acceptable to the Malays, as it contradicted their view of the special rights of the indigenous people and their culture. It was this that led to the separation of Singapore from Malaysia in 1965.

In 1971, the National Cultural Policy was announced. The aim was to create a national culture and national identity which was expected to promote unity and a sense of belonging to the nation among the ethnic groups. The National Cultural Policy was based on the views of the Malays, who basically

see Malaysia as the Malays' country. The policy maintains that the national culture has to be based on Malay culture and religion (Islam). The assimilationist view of national culture is reflected in the cultural and language policies. To complement this policy, from 1981, the policy of Islamisation was introduced to intensify the emphasis on Islamic symbols and ideals in administration as well as in economics and education. The Islamic Bank of Malaysia, Islamic Insurance Schemes, the Islamic University and the teaching of Islamic civilisation courses for all Malaysian students, as well as the importance of Islamic law, have already been implemented (Means, 1991: 99-105).

Strengthening the political status and the characteristic of Malay culture and religion in the society is another way in which the Malay leadership tries to create a strong all-round predominant status over the non-Malay communities. In the process, many matters related to culture, language and religion, have from time to time provoked ethnic ill feelings. One of the most important issues that created a kind of a 'big event' impact on ethnic relations was the issue concerning the Chinese University which is more popularly known as the Merdeka University controversy (Lee, 1980). In another instance, the issue was who founded Kuala Lumpur, Yap Ah Loy (a Chinese) or Raja Abdullah (a Malay)?. But in 1987, the question of the promotion of non-Mandarin speaking teachers in the Chinese (Mandarin) schools was a serious one. It caused friction between the Malays and Chinese and almost created another major riot in Malaysia.

Lee described these issues as a political conflict manifested in the form of a status conflict where symbolic events, or issues '... serve to heighten the cognizance of status differences between ethnic groups ...' (Lee, 1986: 35). He explains, 'There is an implicit understanding between the Malays and non-Malays on the avoidance of publicly discussing sensitive matters, particularly matters dealing with power relations between ethnic groups, such as Malay special privileges. ... Given the restricted conditions under which power issues can be discussed, it is not surprising that many political and non-political groups select status issues as an outlet for ethnic grievances' (1986: 43).

Conclusion

In this chapter, the factors that have influenced the transformation of ethnic relations in Malaysia among the major ethnic groups (Malays, Chinese, Indians) from the period of British colonialism to the post-Independence period has been presented. The divisions among the ethnic groups in Malaysia encompass cultural, economical, spatial and political spheres for Malaysia to be considered as a plural society par excellence. What is called *institutional completeness* in sociology, to use Breton's term, has given ethnicity in Malaysia the strength to persevere. Strong parallel ethnic institutions in politics, economic, socio-culture and family spheres have greatly influenced the way in which Malaysians express the importance of their

ethnicity depending on the nature and organisation of the social contexts in which they take part. The establishment of ethnic institutions that accelerated ethnic cultural, social, economic and political practices have created relatively strong ethnic group enclaves, ethnic sentiments and identity in the society. Ethnic boundaries, ethnic group solidarity and interethnic contact among ethnic groups have been enhanced through various ethnic institutions. Thus, it is not surprising, as Nash emphasises, that the salience of ethnicity in Malaysia has been infiltrated in all the three macro, meso and micro levels or spheres of social organisations encompassing political, economical and ordinary daily interactions among ethnic groups (1989: 30).

In the beginning, there was very little opportunity for interethnic contacts and cooperation among ethnic groups mainly owing to the division of labour along ethnic lines. The situation encouraged development of communal-based politics and sentiments in the society. There was not any common political interest that could unite them. In fact, multi-ethnic political organisations never seemed to interest them, even during the period when common anti-colonial British feelings were felt among all the ethnic groups. Ethnic allegiance in political mobilisation has taken a strong hold in Malaysian society since then. Divided nationalism among ethnic groups had denied political integration via a strong sense of common political community identification and equal constitutional rights between the Malays and non-Malays. Instead, the Malays' strong rejection

of the principles of equal citizenship rights had brought about the establishment of the constitutional rights of Malay hegemony. This institutionalisation of Malay political hegemony has consequently resulted in the implementation of ethnic preferential cultural, language and, more importantly, economic policies in favour of the Malays.

Political cooperation among the major ethnic political organisations[5] has come to play a significant role in achieving independence for Malaysia. They form a coalition government which since then has provided considerable political stability to the society. But conflicting interests of the ethnic groups, basically between the contradicting constitutional rights of the Malays' special position and common nationality of the non-Malays, is still very much an important underlying social force that has mobilised ethnic consciousness and ethnic identity in Malaysia.

In 1969, the ethnic riot which took place in Malaysia led to the introduction of new policies and strategies to try to forge national unity. These policies, which greatly favoured Malay interests, have focussed on the strategies to improve the participation of Malays in the Malaysian economy and establishing Malay-Muslim ethnic identity as a national identity. The policies are consistent with the awakening of new radical Malay nationalism in the post-Independence

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5 After the 1969 riot, the Alliance Party (UMNO, MCA and MIC) was expanded with the inclusion of other ethnically based parties and was called the National Front *(Barisan Nasional)*.

period. But for the non-Malays, it is not the kind of experience that one can expect to make their relation with the Malays a more satisfactory one with regards to the Malay political domination. It is not the kind of experience that they may have expected from initial power bargaining, or sharing consociationalism[6]. Without giving consideration to the cause of non-Malays' political frustration and the marginalisation of their ethnic identity and rights in the process of nation building, one cannot ensure that the post-1969 period has found a solution to ethnic conflict in Malaysia, or has undermined the importance of ethnicity in Malaysian society. Politically, and to a certain extent culturally, ethnicity in Malaysia has strengthened the salience of ethnic allegiance among peoples. More importantly, ethnic allegiance in post-Independent Malaysia, as the above discussion tries to emphasise, is strongly mobilised at the macro level where political decisions and public policies are made on the basis of power relations between Malays and non-Malays.

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6 'Consociationalism', Stephen Chee wrote, '...refers to inter ethnic power-sharing, rather than winner-takes-all political confrontation, by, compromise or accommodation of conflictual claims through elite transactions on behalf of their communities' (1991: 54)

Chapter 2

THEORETICAL APPROACHES AND CONCEPTUALISATION OF ETHNICITY

Introduction

The present research concerning Malaysian ethnicity has its origin in Michael Banton's rational choice model of ethnically salient behaviours. This model is applied in this study with the aim of assessing the importance of ethnic identity and ethnic conflict in Malaysia in relation to Chinese ethnic alignment. The research is partly motivated by an interest in testing the suitability of this model, in particular the individualistic approach implicit in the rational choice theory. The study will be able to demonstrate the usefulness of this method in understanding ethnicity in a society like Malaysia. The study will also be able to ascertain whether this individualistic approach allows us to make a conclusive and comprehensive generalisation about the sharpness, or otherwise, of ethnicity and ethnic conflict in Malaysia.

The resurgent interest in ethnicity and the way in which scholars try to understand the salience of ethnicity in different societies have been influenced by the notion of an ethnic revival. The development of ethnic groups' consciousness and movements in many societies has produced what we may refer to as 'ethnic phenomena' to use Depres' term (1975). In the present world, ethnicity plays a central role in the politics of many societies. Ethnicity becomes

the basis either for national separatism or for political subordination. Ethnicity, Horowitz writes, 'is at the centre of politics in country after country, a potent source of challenges to the cohesion of states and of international tension' (1985: xi). Ethnic conflict is a world-wide phenomenon, with almost all the nations of today composed of multiethnic populations (Connor, 1978:382; Wardhaugh, 1987:52). To put it rather differently, Wardhaugh says, 'Fewer than 10 per cent of the states of the world are also nations if we insist that a nation be virtually monoethnic in composition' (1987: 52). The problem of ethnicity has been looked upon primarily as an issue of the modern world (Smith, 1986). This does not at all mean that in the old world all societies were homogeneous. Even before the rise of modern nation-states since the 1500s, there have been multiple 'ethnic groups' in many societies, areas and civilisations. But what is rather new are certain types of states, and Malaysia being an example, which have become multiethnic societies because of their recent colonial past. In these societies, the problem of ethnicity has become more crucial. The political stability of many states has been weakened by the emergence and persistence of ethnic conflict.

The increase in the salience of contemporary ethnic phenomena has its impact on the resurgent interest in the study of ethnicity (Yinger, 1976). It has even been referred to by Basham & DeGroot as 'an academic ethnicity industry' (1977:423). This scholarly interest has prompted discussions

which challenge the existing theoretical premises of theories of class conflict, development, urbanisation, and modernisation (Burgess, 1978). These theories predicted that the importance people attach to ethnicity will eventually diminish. Marxists have argued that ethnic attachments would be replaced by class attachments (Anderson, 1983; Wallerstein, 1974)). Liberals arguments state that general value placed on the universalistic concept of the citizen, means it is important that all are regarded as free and equal citizens rather than as people belonging to one ethnic group. These theories suggest that as specific features of the modern world create new forms of consciousness and generate a need for the people to identify themselves with the symbols of a wider social system like class and citizenship, the ethnic attachment will be weakened. But, contrary to the notion of ethnic revival, few others feel that the revival of ethnicity is more of an exaggeration, or a created myth, rather than real. They have expressed disbelief, or doubted the genuineness of its emergence, its impact, and its ability to persist, with reference to advanced societies like America (Gans, 1979; Patterson, 1979; Steinberg, 1981; Waters, 1990). Gans, for example, argues that the current importance attached to ethnicity by the White 'ethnic' in the United States is, in fact, no more than an increase in the ethnic visibility owing to the upward mobility that obtains among them. He sees the identification of Whites with an ethnicity as merely a 'symbolic identification' with their ancestry. Waters (1990) sees the 'symbolic ethnicity' as an option available to a

group or individual to enjoy the traditions of one's heritage without any social costs associated with it.

It is not easy to understand the rise and the persistence of ethnic conflict in different societies. Multiethnic societies differ in internal diversity, intensity of ethnic conflict and in their historical development. Laczko (1994) for example, in his comparative study shows that Canada, Belgium, Switzerland and the United States are a few exceptional cases of societies of higher level of pluralism in relation to their high level of socio-economic development. But on the other hand, he describes Canada as a country with more internal diversity than the United States. The intensity of ethnic problems in these advanced societies may also differ from that of the third world countries. Horowitz observed that ethnic divisions in Third World societies are more serious than in these of the western world (1985: 18). In many countries, Malaysia being one of them, ethnic divisions have become politically important but on the whole the situation in Malaysia is not violent compared to what obtains in some other societies in Asia and Africa where political violence is more common. Horowitz (1989) for example, compared the situation of serious ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka with the relatively harmonious inter-ethnic situation in Malaysia. Ethnic conflict has also increasingly become prominent in Western countries in recent years (Rattansi and Westwood, 1994). In former Yugoslavia, ethnic divisions have resulted in political conflict leading to all-out war and the atrocities that attend it.

This world-wide phenomenon and variations among societies made the application of the concept of ethnicity very ambiguous. As Glazer and Moynihan pointed out:

> *The phenomenon seems everywhere to be encountered, but somehow, everywhere, also, varies. Does a single term (ethnicity) help?' Some might even wonder as they continue, 'Would it not be better to separate the very different problems of old nations from those of the new? Of the developed world from those of the developing? Of heterogeneous empires from homogeneous nation-states? Are these not, in truth, age-old human characteristics and sentiments, expressing themselves, perhaps, in new settings, but in themselves nothing new? (1975: 2).*

Understanding the nature of ethnicity in these societies involves the interrelation of culture, history, politics and psychology. More importantly, social scientists may not be able to comprehend, nor to write comparatively about on a global scale, this phenomenon within a unified or universal theoretical framework. Although a few scholars have attempted to do so, one scholar admits that '... the scale of comparison is too ambitious, the unified theory is destined to continue to escape us, and the class of phenomena is highly elusive' (Fenton, 1987: 277). The differences that various societies experience in the intensity of ethnic divisions and conflicts, their changes and persistence over time, place and generations, have produced different views on the nature of ethnicity and the different methodological stances adopted to study and understand ethnicity.

Theoretical Approaches

Ethnic attachment, according to one general argument, is seen as the way in which people are engaged in preserving some sense of *Gemeinschaft* (community) which has been lost in the rapidly changing modern, large and heterogeneous society (Parson, 1975: 68-69). As Yinger says, 'An ethnic attachment ... helps one to preserve some sense of community, to know who one is, to overcome the feeling of being a 'cipher' in anonymous world' (1981: 258). Van den Berghe (1978, 1981) and Coon and Hunt (1965) present ethnicity as having a strong biological basis. Over the years, two main theoretical perspectives have emerged in the sociological attempt to understand and explain the problem of ethnicity, its emergence and persistence. These main theoretical debates have revolved around what has become to be referred to in sociology as the *primordial* and *circumstantial* or *situational* approaches. The first views ethnicity as a consequence of 'deep' division among men in history and experience, while the other tries to understand ethnicity as a consequence of 'specific and immediate circumstances' (Glazer and Moynihan, 1975: 19-20). The primordial approach emphasises the organic nature of ethnic group, while the circumstantial approach emphasises the organisational or strategic nature of ethnicity. The following discussion will focus on these two main approaches, and not on the ongoing debate about the strengths and deficiencies of these approaches, or on the synthesising efforts by some scholars. The discussion will

instead focus on how these approaches have characterised the nature of ethnicity and ethnic identity in multiethnic societies of the modern world. It will also be looking at the ways in which these approaches will lead one to explain the salience of Malaysian ethnicity.

The above competing claims of primordialist and circumstantialist can also have their ideological and policy-making ramifications. Within the structure of Malaysian pluralism, primordial ethnicity would stress ethnic group identity and sentiments as the core and persistent features of the Malaysians' everyday social and cultural lives. The circumstantial approach would emphasise the political mobilisation of ethnic group allegiance. This theoretical debate in some respect also reflects the controversy that has arisen over what should the identity of Malaysians be, that is, should the Malays, Chinese and Indians progress towards identifying themselves as *Malaysians* based on their political citizenship label and national loyalty, or should they continue to reinforce their separate ethnic identity? At one level, the government's aim is to develop national unity, national culture and national identity; but at the same time, the leaders of the ethnic groups also lay firm stress on the importance of ethnic group unity, identity and culture. At another level, the Malay political leadership of the Government is attempting to forge a national culture and national identity based on Malay culture and the Muslim religion, reflecting a strong tendency towards assimilationist view. But the non-Malays'

aspiration is to see Malaysia adopt the integration model rather than the assimilation model in forging Malaysian national identity.

a. The Primordial Approach

The term primordial, or primordial view of ethnicity, refers to a kind of core, strong, primary and emotional attachment in ethnic group ties. This is believed to be the underlying causes in much of the ethnic group solidarity, mobilisation, behaviour and identity. The power of primordial ties has been a major emphasis in the earlier observations and writings of some scholars on ethnicity (Geertz, 1963; Gordon, 1964; Greeley, 1971; Novak, 1972; Gambino, 1975; Isaac, 1975; Epstein, 1978). The bond of primordial ethnicity has been clearly reflected in the title of Gambino's writing as 'Blood of my blood ...' and in Novak's as 'The rise of the unmeltable ethnics'.

The quotation that defines primordial ethnicity and carries with it the idea of a powerful emotional link of 'my people', 'my ancestors' and 'my culture' was expressed by Clifford Geertz. He states,

> *By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the `givens'... of social' existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language... and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on, are seen to have an ineffable and at times over-powering coerciveness in and of themselves. One is bound by one's kinsmen, one's neighbour, one's fellow believer, ipso facto; as the result not merely of*

> *personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself (1963: 259).*

Words like 'given of social existence', 'ineffable' and 'coerciveness', used in the above quotation, when applied to the ethnic group, brings about the notion of ethnicity as an inevitable, permanent, unalterable and powerful nature of social identity. It is seen as beyond the control of individuals within the relatively closed organic group membership of people that is bound by similarity of origin in race, religion, or culture.

This primordial approach indeed tries to apply the earlier primordial view of family attachment in understanding ethnic group solidarity, identity and behaviour. Ethnic groups are seen as a large-scale family or organic group, or as one which is founded upon or grounded in kinship ties. Edward Shils who introduced this primordial concept in understanding kinship groups writes:

> *As one thought about the strength and tensions in family attachments, it became apparent that the attachment was not only to the other family member merely as a person but as a possessor of certain especially 'significant relational' qualities which could only be described as primordial. The attachment to another member of one's kinship group is not just a function of interaction. ... It is because a certain ineffable significance is attributed to the tie of blood (1957: 122).*

Primordialism, as one recent writer emphasises, refers to the belief about: (i) the significance of nativity (ii) the significance of the kinship and blood ties and (iii) the

creation and transmission of life (Grosby 1994: 164). These beliefs create the very primordial ties, the strong bond and attachment to the family and other larger groups in which the individual may share similarities in their physical appearance, cultural and religious values and practices.

Harold Isaac, in developing the primordial view of the ethnic group, sees ethnic group identity as consisting of a ready-made set of endowments and identifications (legacies) which every individual shares with others from the moment of birth. These legacies in turn create a sense of belonging, self-esteem, self-acceptance and self-respect among group members (1975: 30-35). By viewing ethnic character as the first and basic source of social identification for an individual, primordiality, as Fishman explains, 'denotes both primacy, in sense of a presumably original essence, as well as primitivism or irreducibility ...' (1977: 17).

The primordial approach views the nature of ethnic group solidarity and membership as a show of strong and persistent emotional attachment to time and place. The emergence and the persistence of strong emotional ethnic ties, behaviour and identity among members are seen as unavoidable and unaffected by the social processes of development, modernisation and urbanisation. As Birch states, ethnic and local loyalties are enduring features of social life. No elaborate reasons are necessary to explain why people retain an attachment to their own ethnic group....These attachments may be overlaid by an acquired loyalty to a wider society

and its political institutions, but the attachments remain' (quoted in Edwards, 1985: 195). This is because primordial ties are perceived as inherited 'ineffable affective significance' which according to this approach, bring the people to believe and to share, through socialisation, a distinctive common trait, common ancestry, and sometimes a common religious view of their cosmic destiny.

For writers like Van den Berghe, the undiminishable primordial nature of ethnicity is viewed rather differently. He sees ethnic and race relations as an extension of the idiom of kinship and stresses the primordiality of ethnicity as 'blind ferocity' and 'orgies of passion'. His basic argument for the primordial nature of ethnic identity is derived rather from the socio-biological perspective which rests on the notion of biological or genetic origin of ethnicity to explain the in-group attachment and out-group conflict among ethnic groups (Van den Berghe, 1978; 1981).

By contrast, the sociological view of the primordiality of ethnicity stresses, as Fishman puts it, the importance of 'paternity...the recognition of putative biological origins.... A vast number of traits and behaviour have been taken to reflect the paternity aspect of ethnicity ...' (1977: 17-18). Because of its central recognition of inherited visible traits and behaviour, the primordial definition of ethnicity could have been strongly influenced by the objective characteristics of ethnic groups based on linguistic, racial, geographical, religious and ancestral

ties. Nash called these 'the building blocks of ethnicity' (1989: 5). These in his view also include '*body*, a biological component expressed as blood, genes, bone, flesh, or other common 'substance' shared among group members'. These objective ascriptive elements of ethnicity are perceived as something 'given' and inherited involuntarily through socialisation. Ethnic group membership is perceived as an involuntary identification which members of an ethnic group come to acquire through the common socialisation of cultural practices and kinship relationships. Because of the perceived link between ethnicity and kinship, early socialisation and primary group membership are stressed by primordialists as important elements in the development of various individuals' strong ethnic identity. It is important that we distinguish between family and blood ties as a fact of life and as a 'language' of ethnicity which picks up kinship metaphors as ideological appeal.

Family kinship relationships and socialisation are real powers that exert influence on the individuals' life. Kinship relationship may be so extensive and meaningful that they come actually to constitute the social system itself. In the family, individuals learn their ethnic language, eating habits including the foods used, cultural and religious practices and taboos, and form relationships with others who are related through blood-ties and marriage within and outside their immediate family. All these are real family experiences that can reinforce a person's ethnic identity. This learning process can make a deep impression

and bring out the importance of their ethnic identity that will last long in their minds. Gordon called it an 'inalienable ascription from cradle to grave, (*which*) becomes incorporated into the self' (1978: 73). However, the processes of socialisation which inculcate ethnic identity, and other ethnic sentiments, may themselves be modified, thus weakening the 'learning' by new generations of these deep-felt allegiances.

'Language' of ethnicity is a different matter. Because of the view about the emotional ties and sentiments primordialists present in their conceptualisation of ethnic group solidarity, this approach has its ideological ramification. The approach possesses a subjective utility, an appealing power among people for finding self '... a home, with a past, a present, and a future transcending the fragile biological vessel that is its container', to quote Nash's phrase (1989: 4). Political leaders may use the kinship metaphor of 'primordial ethnicity' to mobilise ethnic group solidarity and struggle against other groups by relying on factors related to origin and sharing 'the same blood'. Thus, ethnicity differences are charged with emotion and infuses members with moral obligation. This may be an ideological appeal, nonetheless powerful of course, even though the 'real' ascriptive, cultural and socialisation basis are weakened.

In general, it can be said that primordial attachments are more or less similar to the *gemeinschaft*-like sentiments and

relationship. Many scholars have argued about the importance of primordial sentiments in the persistence of ethnic diversity, tensions and conflicts, and the emergence of ethno-nationalism in many parts of the world. Connor, in trying to understand the world-wide phenomena of ethno-nationalism where movements among ethnic groups seeking redistribution of the power of the state or, in some cases, complete separation from the state, states that 'an intuitive bond' among people is more profound and potent than the ties that bind them to the formal and legalistic state structure (1978: 377). He believes that the core to ethno-psychology that promotes ethno-nationalism is a conviction that members of a nation are all ancestrally related (1993: 373).

Clifford Geertz (1963) perceived primordial loyalties as the main cause of the failure in fostering national civil consciousness among the citizens of post-colonial societies, because loyalties of the people are bound by primordial loyalties based on kinship, race, region or culture. Geertz's views of primordial ties appear to refer particularly to the conditions in new societies that have emerged out of colonialism. One can suspect the influence of Furnivall's (1948) earlier idea of a multiethnic society on the view of Geertz and others on primordiality. Furnivall's pluralistic model of a multiethnic society emphasised the rigidity of institutional divisions among the people of different ethnic origin. Consequently, the concern of early scholars on the political integration of people of different

ethnic and racial origins in these new modern states was viewed mainly as a process of transforming parochial primordial loyalties based on ethnic, cultural and geographical origins to a new national consciousness within a wider central political system of new nations (Almond & Powel, 1966; Weiner, 1965). The primordial loyalties are looked upon as social influences that do not correspond with the new allegiance based on common citizenship. Geertz views the conflict as a contradiction between primordial sentiments and civil politics. He believes that although the conflict between these two forces in these societies can be reduced, it cannot be done away with completely(1963: 128).

From the point of view of the primordial conception of ethnicity, it could be suggested that the ethnic identity, culture and religious allegiances of the Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia are really bound into the very closely-knit and tightly organised and extended family life. A further question is, what are the 'building blocks' that would make one believe in the existence of primordial ethnicity among these groups? There are two reasons that could support the argument that in Malaysia there are ethnic groups who have powerful primordial ties. Firstly, these groups differ significantly in their cultural and religious values and practices. They regard themselves as possessors of a distinctive traditional culture, and to a large extent, this is shown in their religious beliefs. Each group, for example, realises the distinctiveness of its mother tongue which may encompass various dialects. They also use their

own ethnic language widely within their family and extended family circles and with other ethnic group peers.

Other cultural and religious characteristics or symbols which may strengthen the view of primordial ethnic attachments include foods, traditional dress for certain occasions, and the festivals that they celebrate. All these are very visible forms of cultural and religious practices of Malaysian life. These same practices could enhance their ethnic group consciousness and identity, thus creating a strong urge to maintain their ethnic boundaries. In this regard, intermarrying outside one's ethnic group is rare in Malaysia. This endogamous norm becomes the most important measure which indicates that in Malaysia there are ethnic groups with strong primordial attachments. In describing the importance of these boundary-maintaining mechanisms in Malaysia Nash states,

> *The boundary mechanisms of bed, board, and cult are a recursive metaphor underlying self-other in term of substance, behaviour, and belief....they communicate, create, and constitute the socially important aspect of persons as members of collectivities thought to differ in human substance,..in conduct,.. and in purpose and destiny.... All of this is socialized in individuals as a particularly precious heritage, as a personal identity, and in the conditions of contemporary Malaysia as somewhat in peril, in a state of siege against hegemonic cultural and religious others (1988: 38-39).*

The second reason that helps account for the strong ethnic attachment among Malays, Chinese and Indians often surrounds the images of the ethnic groups' distinctive past. This provides a historical reason for their belief in the

primordial ties and distinctiveness of their ethnic origin. Malays, Chinese and Indians are regarded, both by themselves and others, to have a totally different descent. There are two factors that could strengthen this belief among the Malays, Chinese and Indians. First, they all came from different regions that are regarded as areas of different culture and civilisation. The Malays came from the Malay Archipelago, whereas the Chinese clearly came from China and the Indians from India and Sri Lanka. Second is their appearance. The three groups basically have distinct physical features. This supports their belief that they are born as Chinese, Indians and Malays, and will continue the distinctiveness of their ethnic origin and self-concept. The absence of some of the cultural and religious traits among individuals may not deny the persistence of their belief in the difference of descent. The *Baba* community, for example, who have adopted the Malay culture to a large extent, are still considered both by themselves and others as basically Chinese because of their Chinese descent (Clammer, 1975). All the above mentioned factors may enhance the sense of belonging of the Malays, Chinese and Indians to their respective groups and, the individual's self-identification which may be referred to as a primordial bond. But we cannot deny the importance of the structural and historical features of Malaysian society that play a major role in shaping the ethnic sentiments and identities of the Malays, Chinese and Indians.

As Glazer and Moynihan pointed out, '... in a world of rapid change and shifting identity, we tend to shy away from any fixed notion of the primordial, of basic ties and connections that create groups, as against any rational interest' (1975: 19). The primordial approach runs into difficulty in explaining the changes, how ethnic identity may be recovered or constructed after long periods of assimilation or acculturation, or lost altogether, as in the case of the Maltese in Britain (Dench, 1975). The inadequacy of the concept is evident in explaining socially constructed ethnic identity, and why people may want to abandon or become more conscious of their ethnic identities at different times or situations. Roosens, for example observed, 'There is more chance that the Flemish in Brussels, who always have to speak French, will become more 'consciously' Flemish than their ethnic brothers and sisters in the rather isolated rural areas of West Flanders or Limburg' (Roosens, 1989: 12). If this is the case, then a more modernised section of the Malay, Chinese and Indian population who live in the metropolitan areas in Malaysia ought to have a higher degree of ethnic consciousness because of their frequent exposure and contact with one another.

The primordialist view of ethnicity stresses human psychology and tries to explain ethnic group consciousness, conflicts and the behaviours of their individual members by stressing the strength of emotion and primordial attachments. The approach pays less attention to the

importance of different social circumstances where different ethnic groups come to interact. James McKay summarises, 'a primordial perspective is extremely useful for understanding the emotional basis of ethnicity and the tenacity of ethnic bonds. But because of its psychological reductionism, its inability to account for social change, and its disregard for political and economic influences, it fails to provide a comprehensive theoretical explanation of ethnic phenomena' (1982: 399).

b. The Circumstantial Approach

In different parts of world there are some ethnic groups who appear to display strong primordial tendencies. In McKay's term, such groups of people, whose identification is socially and culturally rooted in the symbols and primary relationships, may fall into what he refers to as 'ethnic traditionalists'. His examples include the Tunisian Jews in Israel, the Ukrainian Catholics in Australia, the Hutterite communities in North America, and minority groups like the Armenians, Assyrians, Copts, Kurds, Shiites, and the Lebanese Christians in the Middle East. (McKay, 1982:403). On the other hand, there are many cases which demonstrate that the solidarity and identity of ethnic groups fluctuate depending on social contexts at that particular time, place, and generation. A few examples can be considered to verify this.

Today the native American Indians identify themselves politically as native American rather than with their tribal groups as Sioux, Navajo, Oneida, or Kwakiutl. This new emphasis on their native American identity is created in the context of their relationship to the dominant 'white' ethnic population (Yinger, 1981: 258). In Malaysia, the non-Malay Muslims of Chinese and Indian ethnic origins may play down their Chinese and Indian identities for the purpose of claiming equal rights with the Malays. They may align themselves with the interests of the Malays, or Muslims of the country, or even make demands from the government to recognise them officially, or more importantly, their children, as Malays or *Bumiputra* (The Star, 25.10.94; Nagata, 1978). The white people of European origin have also developed distinct identities in different parts of the world, for instance, as *Afrikaners* in South Africa and *Pakeha* in New Zealand. In other countries, like Malaysia and Fiji, Malay and Fijian identities have gained new political strength through the mobilisation of the ideology of indigenousness. With the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the Socialist states in Central and Eastern Europe, ethnicity has emerged with unprecedented force among ethnically-based nations. Most importantly, the contextual character of ethnic identity and ethnic conflict has become strongly influential which is said to be due to the shifting of political conditions, or conflicting political interests among different cultural groups in the society (Horowitz, 1985).

In many sociological works, the likely persistence of deep primordial ties has been viewed with suspicion by writers of both liberal and Marxist persuasions. The Marxists believed that local cultures and ethnic attachments would give way to wider and more embracing loyalties or interests with the strengthening of class consciousness. The liberals, with a few exceptions like Gellner (1983), believed that the granting of equal citizenship, rights and freedom of personal choice in modern states would play an important role in undermining loyalties and interests that are based on membership of a particular ethnic group. Thus, according to scholars like Schlesinger (1993), multiculturalism is viewed as enhancing ethnicity and, inconsistent with individual freedom, political democracy, and human rights of a liberal society like America. Gans, who sees ethnic 'revival' in the United States as a kind of nostalgic expression, or 'symbolic ethnicity' as he calls it, believes that it will eventually fade in the society of future generations because no great deal of instrumental values would be attached to ethnicity (Gans, 1979). As he says, '... even if I am right to predict that symbolic ethnicity can persist into the fifth and sixth generations, I would be foolish to suggest that it is a permanent phenomenon' (1979: 18). Much earlier, the melting pot theory also predicted that the acculturation and assimilation processes in modern societies, like the United States of America, will eventually absorb different ethnic groups into one larger society and culture. It is important to take note that while ethnic groups and ethnic nationalism, as Smith (1981)

pointed out, may have existed in one form or another since pre-idustrial times, the emergence of ethnicity as a powerful political force in many contemporary societies tends to indicate that the ethnic category-making processes are chiefly a modern phenomenon. Some scholars while agreeing on the importance of modernisation and the liberalisation processes in society, have regarded ethnicity and ethnic conflict as a direct or indirect consequence of modernisation and industrialisation (Gellner, 1983; Smith, 1981). They rejected the view that ethnicity will diminish as rational universalistic norms take precedence over traditional particularistic ethnic norms.

However, the main argument of the circumstantial approach that 'contradicts' the primordial approach's persistence of ethnic identity and solidarity, is the fluctuating and contextual nature of ethnic identity and solidarity. But both approaches are not necessarily to be viewed as advocating conflicting views about the nature of ethnicity. Ethnic ties and sentiments may be grounded in kinship life, but the circumstances in which they invoke or take on a wider significance is another question.

It is quite reasonable to argue that ethnic identities are grounded in kinship. It has been discussed earlier that kinship and blood ties are tangible factors. If we take Malaysia for example, we can argue that those who identify themselves as Malays, Chinese or Indians do so because they are born to parents who are also Malays, Chinese or Indians.

Their ethnic origin as each of these is primordial in that sense, because it is part of the very basic fundamental ties. Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnicity in Malaysia partly survives because of the power of family ties in which the young child learns to speak its mother tongue, and assumes other cultural and religious traits. The child learns that his or her own identity as an individual is closely bound up with being Malay, Chinese or Indian.

But at the same time, its ethnic consciousness and importance of its ethnic identity is also subject to fluctuating circumstances. The presence of the Chinese and Indians in Malaysia goes far back. Their arrival during the colonial period created different political and economical situations in which the importance of ethnic identity has taken on a significant role. It becomes even more important politically with the removal of British rule. Under the colonial regime, these ethnic groups were kept apart by and large in different economic sectors and regions. The British have avoided direct conflict between these ethnic groups by keeping them apart within the economy and society and with regards to access to political power. With decolonialisation and the granting of independence, different power relations between these groups came to exist. Under this new circumstance of Malay political hegemony, the ethnic divisions and consciousness and identity have been deeply felt. With the change of circumstances, the same primordial base of the Malay, Chinese and Indian ethnicities may have been provoked to take an important role in the lives of

Malaysians. As one scholar puts it, '... primordial sentiments have to be tied to the *circumstances* under which they are aroused or maintained...the circumstances in which this most often occurs is when the members of an ethnic group face opposition from another group on the basis of their ethnic, or ethno-religious, distinctiveness (Scott, 1990: 167).

Because of these very experiences of flexibility and fluctuation in the expressions of ethnic identity and group solidarity in many societies, the circumstantial approach has become more popular among social scientists (of Marxist and non-Marxist persuasions) of ethnic and racial studies, (e.g. Bell, 1975; Cohen, 1974a; Halsey, 1978; Hechter, 1974; Horowitz, 1975; Nagata, 1974; Olzak, 1982). As James Mckay stated, 'there has recently been a trend away from primordial explanations toward a more dynamic perspective which stresses change, contextuality, and competition among ethnic populations for scarce resources' (1982: 399). Or, for others like Burgess, this trend is viewed as 'a general rejection of traditional anthropological or sociological definitions of ethnic groups ... as being static, overly descriptive, or additive. The search is for more inclusive, dynamic, and analytically useful definitions' (1978: 265).

Starting from Barth's observation of an ethnic group as a social vessel (1969), studies of the dynamic nature of ethnic group boundaries and identities have suggested that these boundaries and identities can be soft, malleable,

permeable, shifting and dissolved. Ethnicity may be acquired or divested depending on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of ethnic identity as an instrument in the defence of social, economic and political interests. Its very nature is looked upon rather as a strategic choice of behaviour to pursue material, or some other social interests, individually or collectively as a group. This, however, need not be seen as a straight choice between viewing ethnic identity as primordial or purely strategic. Both primordial and circumstantial approaches are only different ways in which sociologists try to understand the same problem (ethnicity). One emphasises the way in which ethnicity may have been grounded in family life and, the other emphasises the way in which ethnicity may take greater importance, or otherwise.

As demonstrated in many writings, and through case studies (e.g. Barth, 1969; Isajiws, 1970; Nagata, 1974; Patterson, 1975; Roosens, 1989), much attention has been given to the subjective and situational definition of ethnic belonging. The manipulation of cultural or ritual symbols in the expression of ethnic feelings and behaviour has been stressed. As Barth observed, 'It is important to recognise that although ethnic categories take cultural differences into account, we can assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cultural similarities and differences. The features taken into account are not the sum of 'objective' differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant. ... some cultural

features are used by the actors as signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some relationships radical differences are played down and denied' (1969: 14). In some circumstances and societies, ethnic identity will be assigned an important and comprehensive role, yet in others it may not be given importance but rather assigned a limited value, if not ignored altogether.

A good example in recent times to comprehend the recovering and intensification of ethnic identity, mobilisation and consequently interethnic conflict, is the situation in former Yugoslavia. Here, with the collapse of central Communist power in this region, the new situation prompted political manipulation and organisation of new strength in ethnic group consciousness and conflict between the Bosnian Serbs and Muslims. Although the ethnic divisions between these groups may be an old one, it never emerged as a salient force, or resulted in any form of aggression or ethnic cleansing under the previous state of Yugoslavia. In portraying the contextual and changing nature of ethnicity, the circumstantial approach emphasises ethnicity as a variable that depends both on the structural conditions which may suppress or actuate ethnicity, and the individuals' ability or wish to express it as one of their cognitive choices and strategies (Okamura, 1981).

Presently, similar to the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, many ethnic conflicts are obviously related in one way or another to the defence of social, cultural, and more

importantly, economic and political or territorial interests. In such situations, the affirmation of ethnic identity and the mobilising efforts of ethnic group solidarity has become a very important organisational aspect of social grouping, rather than disregarding the importance of ethnicity. It has been an appropriate and effective instrument in applying pressure in the defence of various interests. Its strategic strength in such instances lies in the positive self-image that ethnic identity can create for individuals in the struggle for these interests. In comparing it with the class strategy, Roosens says,

> *In a world where a reevaluation of 'oppressed' cultures is in vogue in many circles, this (ethnicity) is a way of self-valorization that cannot be achieved by considering oneself, for example, a member of the working class or the lower middle class.... The class division is vertical and is thus a hierarchical division of groups of people; the ethnic division is horizontal, and it creates equivalencies rather than hierarchies. ... politicians can hardly say no to an ethnic group without running the risk of being branded as racists. ... Militant ethnic groups can thus be considered pressure groups with a noble face ... (1989: 14).*

The strategic conception of ethnicity clearly stresses the 'mobilisation', and 'organisational' aspects of ethnicity. By doing so, the circumstantial approach has evidently shifted away from the notion of affective desire for a primordial type of ethnic identity to a conception of strategic choice of ethnic affiliation or allegiance. The circumstantialist arguments have clearly taken into consideration two fundamental realities. First, the circumstantial approach recognises individuals as having

more than one social identity, or attachment, in order to cope with the various roles that they may have to play in different social circumstances. He or she may belong to several social categories, networks, associations, and groups based on age, gender, locality, family, profession, class, political and religious organisations, ethnic and racial groups.

Ethnicity, as such, is seen only as one particular form of collective identity. Its very development as one of the collective social identities is argued to be of a consequence of social interaction between groups. Individuals of either sex may have an early exclusive ethnic identification with their own ancestral community. Yet in their subsequent interactions and transactions in a more heterogeneous social world which includes members of other groups, the need for dual or multiple identities develop. These identities may be overlapping or conflicting, depending upon the roles they play, the individual preference and the ability to express any particular social identity in a given social context. The plurality of social identities forces one to attach different values to different social identities in varying social situations, and consequently, influence the individuals' choice of group allegiance.

The second reality on which the circumstantial view bases its argument is the relationship between structural conditions of inequalities and ethnic resources mobilizing

the acts of man. Man is seen as an active mobilizer of ethnic features and symbols in the pursuit of power, economy, status and upward mobility in society. It comes as no surprise to learn that the circumstantialist view of ethnicity is also referred to as the 'mobilisationist' perspective (McKay, 1982). Ethnic identity and group mobilisation are basically seen as resource mobilisation strategies; this is mobilisation of ethnicity as an effective instrument in the competition for power, status, and economic benefits as well as for the survival of ethnic group culture. Mobilisation of ethnicity refers to the process by which the solidarity of the group is organised based on some feature of ethnic identity (skin, language, customs) in the pursuit of ethnic group interests (Olzak, 1983: 355). Glazer and Moynihan call it the 'strategic efficacy of ethnicity' (1975: 11). Similarly, James McKay stresses, 'renewed ethnic tension and conflict are not the result of any primordial need to belong, but are due to the conscious efforts of individuals and groups *mobilizing* ethnic symbols in order to obtain access to social, political and material resources' (1982: 399).

In the case of contemporary Malaysia, the mobilisation of ethnicity has also been institutionalised to a greater extent in the political structure . The factor that made the persistence and the salience of ethnicity important in Malaysia is the very constitutional definition of Malay ethnicity. This official definition has created a strong division in society between the Malays and non-Malays.

Because the constitutional definition of Malays itself was created as a political device to protect the Malays' special rights and their political hegemony, the political mobilisation of ethnicity in the society has been structured and enhanced politically. As has already been discussed in Chapter 1, the public policies which have been formulated in accordance with the Malays' constitutional special right have further reinforced the divisions and mobilisation of ethnic group consciousness and identity in Malaysia.

We should realise that the mobilisation of ethnic identity is not necessarily confined to political and economic interests alone. Some scholars strongly argue that ethnicity simultaneously serves both political interests and psychological desires for belongingness and meaning in life (Bell, 1975; Cohen, 1974b). As Bell notes, 'ethnicity has become more salient because it can combine an interest (*of circumstance*) with an affective tie....for values of the society to be realized politically...'(1975: 169). Michael Banton pointed out that, 'there are remarkable variations in the extent to which groups use their resources to build up their collective power' (1987: 135).

So far the sociological debate between the primordial and circumstantial views of ethnicity has been discussed. The different emphasis of the primordial and circumstantial approaches on the nature of ethnic solidarity and membership - one on persistence and emotional psychological content, and the other on fluctuation and social organisation of

ethnicity - may be viewed by some scholars as reconcilable. Some efforts exist in synthesising both these approaches (Mckay, 1982; Scott, 1990). There are different dimensions and meanings that both the primordial and circumstantial approaches offer in understanding the very nature of ethnicity. Both approaches indicate that ethnicity not only involves a number of interrelated variables (psychological and circumstance), but also indicate the way in which ethnicity may be mobilised and expressed at different levels (individual and societal).

Methodological Implication

The circumstantial approach, in contrast to the primordial approach, suggests that ethnic group awareness and identification are conscious, voluntary, calculated and goal- oriented behaviours on the part of ethnic group members. Since the expression of ethnicity is implicitly viewed in the circumstantial approach as a rational act, and voluntary in nature, some other scholars have also focused on the 'rational' action of individuals in their study of ethnicity. The issue that particularly interests them is how ethnic members as actors in society will solve the conflicting identities and interests. These social interests and identities arise as a result of the individuals' group attachments based on class, religious, sexual, ethnic, national and regional differences. The way in which individuals choose to act motivated by certain interests may coincide with or contradict one or the other in any

particular social context. This has been given priority in the methodological framework of some scholars in their attempt to explain the dynamics of ethnic identity and behaviour.

By giving priority to the individual's preference for different interests and identities, and the changing nature of social contexts in which individuals participate, a different type of argument and method of assessing the salience of ethnicity in a society has been advocated within the circumstantial approach. This has resulted in the anascopic view of ethnicity. The method has been referred to as *methodological individualism*, or *actor model* to differentiate it from the catascopic view which emphasises *methodological collectivism*, or *observer model* (Banton, 1994; Birnbaum and Leca, 1990). Generally, those in favour of methodological individualism argue that an individual's behaviour is goal-oriented and a calculated one, capable of making rational choices based on availability, subjective value and marginal utility of actions as a means to an end (Banton, 1983; Blau, 1964; Heath, 1976). In studies like Laitin's (1992), the same argument of maximizing goal or pay-off through rational calculation is founded in the Game theory.

According to the anascopic view, ethnic behaviour, identity, solidarity and survival depend on the individuals' own choice of whether to act according to his or her ethnic sentiments or on other social and personal self interests.

In accordance with the situational definition and individual choice of ethnicity, Michael Banton has developed a new theoretical approach which he calls the 'Rational Choice Theory' of race and ethnic relations. The autonomy of individual members in a society to align ethnically, or otherwise, as stressed by the Rational Choice Theory, is seen as a consequence of their own choice of actions based either on ethnic sentiments, or other personal and social interests. The 'rational choice theory' which is founded on contextual, circumstantial approach, need not be seen as an essential methodological strategy to the circumstantial approach. But it offers a new way of conceptualising and studying ethnicity.

Rational Choice Theory and its Application in Malaysia

In formulating the Rational Choice Theory (RCT), Michael Banton first wrote his article on ethnic groups, and the theory of rational choice for the UNESCO book (1980: 475-499), and later in two of his books (1983; 1987) with an extensive explanation and clarification of this theory. Since coming to the arena of discussion, this theory has not only been associated or grouped with other related theoretical arguments (Blau, 1964; Heath, 1976; Hechter, 1982; Rabushka, 1974), but its potentiality for analysing racial and ethnic relations has also been open to criticism (For eg. see special issue published on 'Rational Choice Revisited' in the Journal of Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vol. 8 (4), 1985). To note some comments, the review article by

Chivers on the discussions by various writers on Banton's Rational Choice Theory states, 'none of the papers goes as far as total rejection of r.c.t. .... There is some feeling that the approach has potential and desire to see it clarified. Equally ... there is doubt. So much that requires explanation in action falls outside Banton's theory, while even where his r.c.t. might claim to be applicable, the influence of less than rational forces seems unintegrated in the analysis' (1985: 470).

Generally, the idea of rational choice can be seen as an approach which tries to apply the economists' simplistic notions of gain and loss as basic motivations for much of human behaviour, including the sphere of ethnic relations. Banton argues that ethnic group (or identity), its creation, maintenance and dissolution, as any other group, can be understood only through the responses of individuals. This according to him can only be properly assessed through the framework of methodological individualism to measure the aggregate tendency for ethnic alignment, as it can be done in examining the aggregate demand for labour, profit, attitudes, strikes, elections, etc.(1991; 1994).

The recent research by Mansor (1992) shows how the idea of individuals' rational behaviour can be used as a model in studying ethnic alignment. He used the model to investigate the relative strength of Malay ethnic alignment in Malaysia. In an article consequently published in 1992, Banton and Mansor (and in another article by Banton in 1994) maintained

the individualistic approach that Mansor deployed in his study to offer a new technique to measure empirically the strength of ethnic alignment in a multiethnic society like Malaysia.

The key statement which is an important ingredient for an actor model in RCT and which forms the basic tool in the study, is 'individuals act so as to maximise their advantage' (Banton, 1983: 104-109; 1987: 121-127). They ascertain in the above article that, 'Ethnic boundaries do not maintain themselves. It is the actions of individuals in choosing whether or not to align themselves with others of similar ethnic origin that strengthens, maintains, or weakens ethnic boundaries. Sometimes individuals feel that they have no real alternatives but to align themselves in a particular way, but there is still an act of will on their part.... Changes in alignment came about as a result of individual choices. The individual has to assess whether he or she can best attain his or her ends by aligning with others.... they can sometimes be pursued best by aligning with others with whom ends are shared, but that on occasion their pursuit requires the individual to weigh the benefits of self-interested action relative to the costs of deviating from the expectations of the peer group' (1992; 599, 601).

However, it is rather a different view that Daniel Bell observed much earlier. He says, 'A 'pure' market economy is one where demands (purchases) are made by individuals acting independently of each other, and where the responses by the

producers of goods and services are an aggregate of multiple, competitive supply decisions at relative prices. ... A market is dispersed, and the actors largely 'invisible'. In politics, decisions are made in a cockpit, and confrontation is direct. Inevitably, therefore, the spread of political decision-making forces the organization of peoples into communal and interest groups, defensively to protect the places and privileges, ...'(1975: 144-145). As Jenkins sees it, the influences of power and authority that are beyond the individual's level, or sphere of control also play a role as important practical forces of external definition in the production of ethnic identity in any society (1994).

As a newly-proposed general theory of race and ethnic relations, one might be doubtful about the potentiality of RCT and wait and see its future development. One may want to know in what sort of situations, or levels of interethnic relations the theory might give a better explanation than the others. This is crucial because, as Jenkins sees it, 'in the practical accomplishment of (ethnic) identity, two mutually interdependent but theoretically distinct social processes are at work; internal definition (at lower level of individual choice) and external definition (at the higher level of power determinant). These operate in different ways at the individual, interactional and collective levels' (1994: 218).

Nevertheless, Mansor's study in Malaysia does represent an early attempt to employ RCT to derive useful concepts and working variables to study empirically individual ethnic preference in relation to other interests. Through the framework of the individualist approach of RCT, concepts that represent norms, values, or interest, and situations that represent value conflict have been devised to assess the relative strength as well as the patterns of individual ethnic preference in different social contexts of everyday life in Malaysia. In this present study, a similar technique of conceptualisation of rational choice 'ethnicity' in the situations of value conflict in different hypothetical social contexts in Malaysia will again be put to the test. In addition to replicating Mansor's study, this thesis also attempts to develop a critique of rational choice theory. This critique will locate the data within the wider Malaysian society and make use of another type of theoretical approach. In this, the idea of different levels of ethnic relationships will be outlined and explored. This means that this study, while taking into account the micro level exprience of ethnicity where people may make ethnic preference choices in their everyday interethnic interaction, goes beyond it to consider the entrenchment of the ethnic dimension in the structures of state power.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this chapter, the formulation and clarification of research objectives, the characteristics of the respondents chosen for the study, the method of sampling and data collection, the definition and operationalisation of concepts and tools of measurement will be described. The present study is a replication of Mansor's earlier study in assessing the strength of ethnic alignment of the Malays in particular and in Malaysia in general, and has employed the same sort of questions as were used in Mansor's to measure the strength of Malaysian Chinese ethnicity. These questions were used as a tool to measure the relative strength of ethnicity in comparison with other interests, in particular that of material and status self-interests and personal obligation.

The core of the present questionnaire survey is the hypothetical questions concerning an 'ethnic representative actor'. These hypothetical questions described some possible social interethnic situations of Malaysian life; they were designed according to the rational choice principle embracing an individualistic approach to ethnicity. Ethnic identity is studied as a matter of choice that individuals in a society may, or may not, choose depending on how they perceive its utility compared to other available interests. The study deployed a research technique which depends upon

the subject's prediction of how an ethnic representative actor will act in various hypothetical situations of value conflict. This technique, according to Banton and Mansor, offers a new method in studying the salience of ethnicity in a society like Malaysia (1992).

Firstly, the application of the technique and question will be presented as it is defined in Mansor's study. Being a second study, some critical assessment of the technique and its theoretical assumptions has become essential. This is vital to assess the effectiveness of the individualistic approach and the hypothetical questions employed in both Mansor's and present studies, in measuring and understanding the way in which people might express their ethnicity in Malaysia. One would be able the assess the strength and weakness of methodological individualism in measuring and understanding the relative importance of ethnicity and ethnic conflict in Malaysia by looking at the way in which Malaysians are believed to express their choice of ethnic preference at the individual level.

Prediction Technique and Focus of Study

Focusing on the way in which members of the society make sense of particular social situations to understand human society is not a new perspective in sociological analysis. The theory of symbolic interactionism, for example, has emphasised the very same principle. Ethnicity has both objective and subjective attributes. The methodological

importance of the subjective definition of ethnicity is that it emphasises the way in which people think of the importance of their own ethnic identity, as well as that of others, in their relation with others in different social contexts. The 'social distance' studies, for example, have concentrated in these areas of race and ethnic relations with the aim of investigating the possible behaviour of interethnic association or dissociation from the way in which people may perceive their social distance from others. This individualistic approach is trying to look at the way in which members of ethnic groups may choose, or prefer not to, act in relation to others in terms of their own ethnic identity and their perception of the social distance from other ethnic groups.

The basic theoretical assumption on which Mansor's and the present research method was based is that individuals are believed to make rational choices based on one of a range of interests, including the choice of ethnic preference. Theories, mainly those drawing upon economic reasons for human behaviour, have been most explicit about this. As Banton conceives, in polyethnic societies like Malaysia, it is possible to talk about interaction between ethnic members as a competitive exchange in market-like situations that require individuals to make a choice between alternative values or interests to determine the behaviour which will relatively benefit them most (1987: 121-127). As Banton and Mansor stress, 'The rational choice theory of racial and ethnic relations presupposed that individuals act so as to

obtain maximum net advantage....It is a general theory of aggregate behaviour which tries to ascertain the costs and benefits of choices between available alternatives, and presumes that over time people will favour the kinds of choice which produce optimal results' (1992: 601-2).

The way in which people think, believe or perceive themselves or others, however, may not necessarily be consistent with their own action, although there may exist a strong correlation between attitudes and actions in some instances. The discrepancy, as one observer pointed out, 'We still do not know much about the relationship between what people say and what they do - attitudes and behaviour, sentiments and acts, verbalisations and interactions, words and deeds' (Deutscher, 1966: 242). This, as such, can well be the dilemma for the subjects when they are asked to indicate their own ethnic alignment.

To increase the consistency between the subjects' attitudes and the prediction of actions they may take, some measures of improvement in the technique of data-collection is essential. This can be done by not directly asking them to indicate their preferred choice of action, but by using the indirect method of others' predictions of the behaviour of an 'ethnic representative actor'. This is the technique employed in Mansor's and the present study. In this technique, the respondents chosen for the study will not be asked to indicate or provide any information on their own individual ethnic preferences in the various social

situations presented. Instead they will be asked to predict the possible action that an imagined ethnic representative will choose to perform in different hypothetical social situations (Banton and Mansor, 1992: 599-601). The technique invites subjects to make an estimation of how another person might behave in certain given situations. This technique possibly will lessen the constraints on the minds of the subjects in deciding and displaying what they may believe is their preferred action in certain interethnic situations. As Banton and Mansor claim, "this technique has some advantages over the other because it makes less demand upon the subjects' imagination and it increases the range of situation that can be included in the study" (1992: 600).

By asking subjects to predict the reactions of the ethnic representative actor, they could well be demonstrating indirectly their own attitudes and possible choice of action in various circumstances. This may vary in a number of ways. Thus, a subject may predict a particular choice of action for fellow ethnic members, or for their 'ethnic representative actor', because they themselves may act in such a manner in the given circumstances. This is possible because an individual will take into consideration his or her own attitudes and sentiments as well as their belief in how their peers would evaluate their behaviour. The possibility of the subjects projecting how they themselves will act in these hypothetical circumstances can happen only as far as the prediction of own ethnic group members are concerned. In this study which concerns Malaysian Chinese

ethnicity, both the Chinese and Malay subjects' views of Chinese ethnicity will be assessed. This means only the Chinese subjects can respond on ethnic basis but the Malay subjects may also respond personally on the basis of other factors such class, work and gender.

In this study, the Chinese and the Malay subjects were asked to predict how an imagined Malaysian Chinese ethnic representative actor would act in various hypothetical, but possible, social situations of value conflict. The hypothetical situations of value conflict in which an imagined Chinese ethnic representative is involved will be clarified in the section under operationalisation. For the ethnic representative actor in this study, an imagined person named Tan Seng Seng has been introduced to represent the Chinese in Malaysia. Like the ethnic representative in Mansor's study (Husin Ali), Tan Seng Seng is presented to the subjects as a clerk attached to a multinational engineering firm. Among the Malaysians, particularly in relation to interaction between the Malays, Chinese and Indians, proper names of these individuals are in themselves a reliable indication of their ethnic origin. People in Malaysia will be able to tell without any doubt whether a person is of Chinese, Malay, or Indian origin just by the sound of his name. A person's proper name symbolises ethnic identity, and as such can invoke different expectations from one's own and other ethnic group members of how an 'ethnic' person would act in a particular social circumstance. The expectation of ethnic role behaviour may also include the

act of ethnic preference. This act may be culturally and politically defined and expected from a member of a particular ethnic group. This act of ethnic preference, or alignment, could indicate the presence of ethnic sentiments and attachment, and its salience in the society. Politically this is a pervasive fact in Malaysian society. A person with a Chinese, Malay, or Indian name would be expected generally, for example, during the general, or by-elections, to show a more favourable attitude of 'ethnic loyalty' by choosing his own ethnic candidate in preference to others.

The expectation of the act of ethnic preference could also be reinforced by the religious background of a person. In Mansor's study, the 'ethnic representative' actor's name Husin Ali, not only indicates his Malay ethnicity but also his Muslim religious identity. In a similar way, the name Tan Seng in the present study not only indicates Chinese ethnicity but also indicates his religious identity as a non-Muslim and a non-Christian Chinese. He would be instead identified as belonging to the mainstream of the Malaysian Chinese, whose traditional religious belief encompasses the element of beliefs and practices of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and ancestral worship. A point of clarification has to be made here: if a Chinese person converts to Islam, he or she normally will adopt a Malay-Muslim name either totally (eg. *Razali bin Abdullah* for a male, or *Hafsah binti Abdullah* for a female), or partially (eg. *Mohd. Lee Abdullah*). ***Abdullah***, as we can see in the examples, will be the common ending in their names to indicate, or to stress

their new Muslim identity. If a Chinese is a Christian, then their Chinese name will normally be preceded by an English-Christian name, if not totally, in most cases (eg. *Raymond Lee Ong Seng* or *Wendy Ong Siew Gaik*). The name Tan Seng Seng as such is relevant to indicate a 'mainstream' Chinese Malaysian.

Objectives

This study covers both wider general and specific objectives. From a wider perspective, the focus of the present study on the Chinese ethnic alignment would, as a consequence, be related to, and form a wider general objective for this study. This wider objective is to understand trends and factors that may have strengthened, or otherwise, Malaysians' ethnicity and ethnic conflict in the society since independence. This objective is relevant to this study because one may argue that the 'building blocks of ethnicity', as Nash (1988) sees it, between the major ethnic groups - Malays, Chinese and Indians - in Malaysia have become hardened in the historical process of the modern Malaysian state. In this context of general objective, as mentioned earlier, this study would be able to assess the suitability or the extent of the individualistic approach employed in this study to investigate and tell one about the sharpness, or otherwise, of ethnicity and ethnic conflict in Malaysia.

Second, the specific aims of this study that related to the wider objective are as follows:

(i) To assess the strength of Chinese ethnic preference or alignment in Malaysia in relation to other interests, in particular to self-interests of material and status kinds, and of personal obligations. Ethnic preference will be posed as an alternative to the material and status self-interests and personal obligation, or vice verse. [The other two following objectives are related to this objective in the sense that it shows the way in which this will be measured and counter-checked].

(ii) To compare and analyse the way in which his own Chinese ethnic members and Malay ethnic members believe an imagined Chinese person will choose to act in different situations where the choices of ethnic preference seem to be in conflict with self-interests of material and status kind and personal obligation.

(iii) Assessment of relative strength of ethnic preference at the interpersonal level, as undertaken in this study, cannot be understood without reference to developments in the wider social systems that have a direct impact on the experiences and attitudes of the people. These

macro-level processes cannot be ignored as they may strengthen or weaken the importance of ethnicity, and consequently, ethnic conflict in the society and affect the way in which people may express their ethnic identity, or sentiments at the face to face personal level of interaction. For this purpose, we will also investigate in this study the strength of similarities and differences between the Chinese and Malay subjects in the usage of language, interethnic contact and their political attitudes concerning some important social issues and problems in the society. By looking at the subjects' own experiences and social and political attitudes, we will be able to counter-check the validity of the results from the survey based on the hypothetical questions and the ethnic representative.

Operationalisation of Concepts and Measurements

(i) Situations of Value Conflict and The Choice of Ethnic Preference

The choice of *ethnic preference* and *situations of value* conflict are two of the most important concepts which have to be understood clearly. Both respectively indicate the way in which the act of ethnic alignment is measured and interpreted from the choices subjects make. Situations of value conflict in general can be referred to specific social contexts of interethnic situations where interests of ethnic

preference are in competition with other interests as factors that will determine the type of action a person might take in a particular social situation. In this particular survey research, however, other interests that are taken into consideration for observation are limited to self-interests of material and status kinds and personal obligations. In the present study, these situations of value conflict are hypothetically constructed based on possible social interethnic interactions that might occur in the Malaysian scene.

The situations of value conflict as posed to the subjects in this study do occur in the course of everyday life. Situations where ethnic preference and other considerations are in competition can be considered as part of interethnic interactions in a polyethnic society like Malaysia. The assumption that ethnic influences could be challenged in some social situations cannot be totally rejected. The importance individuals attach to ethnic preference may vary from situation to situation depending on the nature of matters in each social context. In this survey, various possible social contexts have been included to enable us to observe the consistency, or variability in the pattern of the choices the subjects make in different situations. This is vital in order to derive a meaningful conclusion about the relative importance of ethnicity to the Chinese in Malaysia.

Different symbols have been selected to represent choices of ethnic preference presumed to be in conflict with other interests in different social situations. These concepts have, as mentioned earlier, been derived from the general theory of rational choice in ethnic relations, that is that alignment with an ethnic group is something which is a rationally chosen, alternative alignment. Ethnic preference, and alignment are seen as patterns of behaviour resulting from the actions of individuals who constantly seek alternative actions that will benefit them most. An act of ethnic preference, as it is conceived here, can be seen as a reaction to ethnic symbols that are designed as stimuli to indicate whether or not an individual's behaviour would be influenced by ethnic interests, sentiments, loyalty, or even ethnic prejudice. However, in Mansor's study the term 'ethnic loyalty' was used to represent the influence of particularistic ethnic norms against the influences of universalistic norms that were represented by material and status self-interests and personal obligations. While 'ethnic loyalty' is a value in its own right, in Mansor's study this influence has been posed as a non-material interest. But in reality, the showing of ethnic solidarity and other acts of ethnic preference can also be 'material' if such acts are considered by individuals as vital in their interethnic interaction.

This preference comparison between two or more conflicting values to measure the strength of ethnic alignment is possible only if specific social situations of value

conflict can be identified. Thus, ethnicity in this research is defined and measured in the social contexts of value conflict where ethnic preference is believed to be in competition with other interests. It is important to understand that in reality ethnic preference is not necessarily a matter that will always be in conflict with other interests. In the present survey, as one already knows, these situations of value conflicts were presented to subjects through different hypothetical social scenarios. From the observer's interpretation, these hypothetical situations appear to pose such a conflict. This gives rise to the issue of validity of measurement and this will be clarified later.

The theoretical assumption of rational choice behaviour forms the basis of the operationalisation of different hypothetical social situations. In Mansor's study, these hypothetical situations in which an imagined Malay person and his family members are involved, were formulated to represent everyday social interethnic interactions between the Malays and other ethnic group members in Malaysia. These hypothetical social situations were replicated with some small modifications to suit the objective of the present study so as to measure the strength of Malaysian Chinese ethnic alignment. They were created for an imagined Chinese person and his family members to represent the interethnic experiences of the Malaysian Chinese with other ethnic members. A few additional hypothetical situations of value conflict have been included to strengthen the observation.

Four categories of hypothetical situations of value conflict have been formulated. These are as follows:

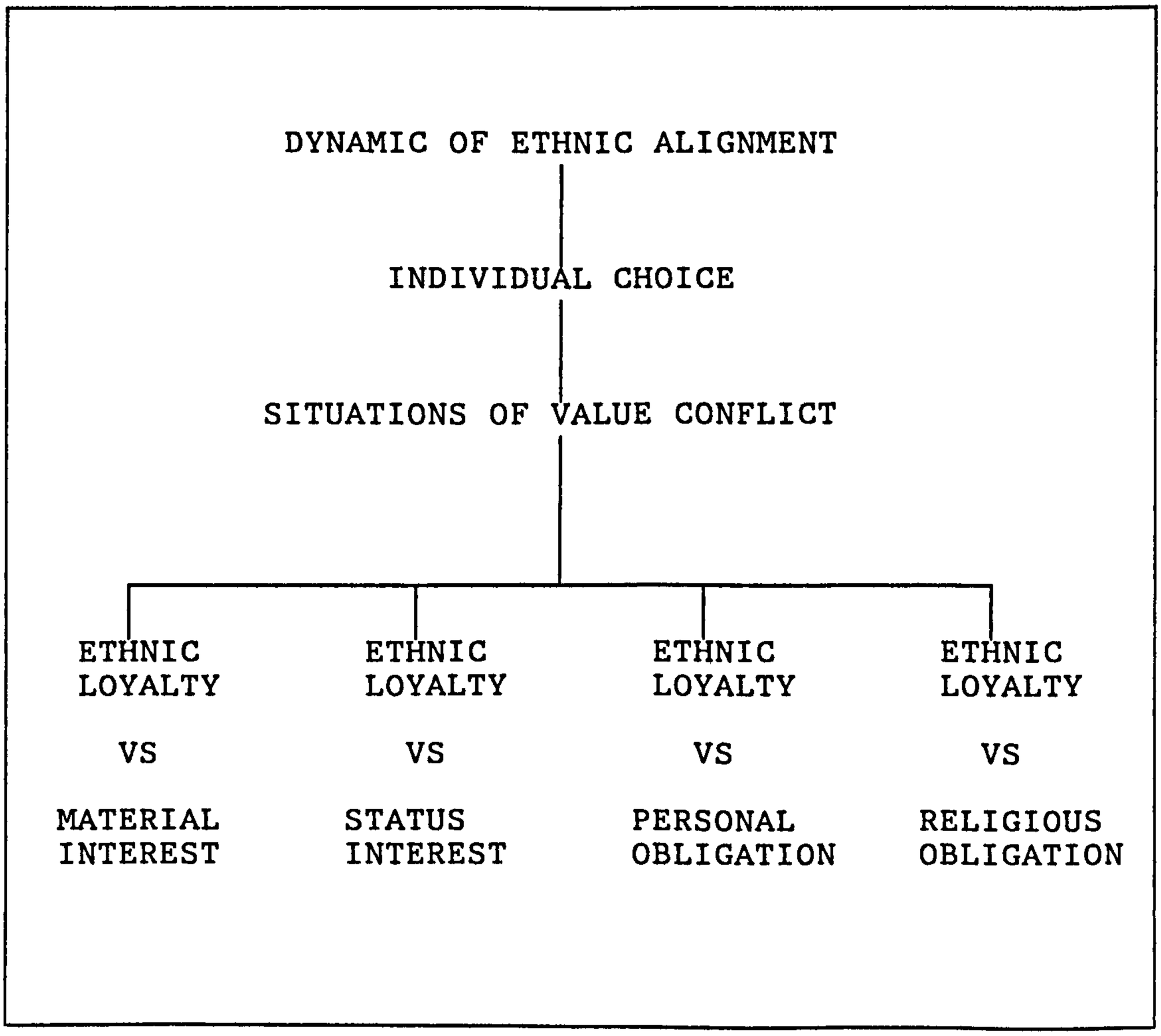
(a) situations of ethnic preference versus self-interest of material kind

(b) situations of ethnic preference versus self-interest of status kind

(c) situations of ethnic preference versus personal obligation

(d) situations of ethnic preference versus religious obligation

Figure 3.1 OPERATIONALISATION



(ii) Questions, Choices and Interpretations

Each of the above social contexts of value conflict was operationalised further in the form of observable hypothetical social situations. These are the plausible realistic everyday interethnic interactions which may be faced by Malaysian Chinese individuals like Tan Seng Seng.

The subjects were presented with these situations in a multiple choice questionnaire of possible actions from which Tan Seng Seng and his family members could choose. These choices are taken to represent different values, norms or interests, including ethnic preference. The subjects were asked to predict what the imagined representative's ethnic preference would be over other values in those various situations. This is presumed to indicate whether or not he will be influenced by ethnic sentiments in these situations by aligning himself with a fellow ethnic, or with an act that will possibly support, or be consistent with his ethnic interest, prejudice, and sentiments. Such inclinations were interpreted as acts of ethnic preference, or ethnic alignment, in this study.

The series of questions and choices and its interpretations are as follows:

(a) For the situations of **ethnic preference versus self-interest of material kind**, the questions asked subjects to predict whether Tan Seng Seng or any of his family members would choose to:

(i) do shopping in Cheng San's shop (fellow ethnic) or in Jaafar's shop (Malay ethnic)

(ii) leave the keys to his house with a next-door Malay neighbour, or leave his front door unlocked pending the expected arrival of his sister

(iii) rent his house to a Malay tenant or leave it unoccupied

(iv) baby-sit a Malay child

(b) For the situations of ethnic preference versus self-interest of status kind, the questions asked whether Tan Seng Seng or any of his family members would choose to:

(i) take along Nasir, a doctor's son, or Ah Chuan, a housemaid's son, to the zoo

(ii) marry a fair-skinned but elder sister or dark-skinned younger sister

(iii) adopt a fair looking Indian child or an unusually dark-skinned Chinese child

(iv) attend first Hamid's, a Malay director's wedding invitation or Leong's, a Chinese shopkeeper's

(c) For the situation of ethnic preference versus personal obligations, the questions asked whether Tan Seng Seng or any of his family members would choose to:

(i) go to his Indian workmate's wedding

(ii) support his boss who is a Malay or a Chinese replacement

(iii) allow his two year old daughter to be taken by his Malay neighbour to play with her child for an afternoon

(iv) agree to marry a Malay person

(v) allow his son to bring home his Malay friends as playmates

(vi) offer Abdul Taha, a Malay or Lim Wong Peng, a Chinese the post of office boy in his company

(d) For the situations of ethnic preference versus religious obligations, the questions asked whether Tan Seng Seng or any of his family members would choose to:

(i) vote either for Ah Huat or for Ah Chong (who seem to be committed towards religious obligations) or for Ah Hock who seems to be active in his religious commitments

(ii) vote either Chuan or Yap (who are not backed by the Chinese religious group) or Lee (supported by the Chinese religious group

The above alternative choices of acts provided in each question that represents different values, or interests are summarised in Table 3.1.

(iii) Prediction of Tan Seng Seng's Mother's Reaction

For all the situations mentioned above, the subjects were also asked to predict what Tan Seng Seng's mother's choice would be. The sociological significance of Tan Seng Seng's mother's choice is to see whether the subjects perceive any significant differences in the strength of ethnic preference between the Chinese of older and younger generations.

4. Validity of Measurement

A point of clarification has to be made here regarding the measuring of ethnic alignment through the choices presented to the subject. Uncertainty as to whether the given choices actually measure the presumed interests can arise. As a

result, one can be doubtful of this measurement truly reflecting the relative strength, or weakness of ethnic alignment even at the individual level. We need to be assured that when the subjects choose the given non-ethnic choices for the ethnic representative, it truly indicates the relatively weak ethnic alignment among individuals. We certainly cannot deny the possibility of these choices not indicating the interests that are presumed, or that other interests might overlap, or be consistent with the choices of ethnic interests itself. To put it plainly, we do not know why the subjects make the choices they do.

What inferences may be drawn on the problem of validity of measurement and interpretation is in fact acknowledged by Banton and Mansor. In some situations, as they disclose, 'a subject may acknowledge that in a particular situation, he or she is expected to manifest group loyalty, but maintain that in these circumstances he or she is also bound by another obligation which has to take precedence' (1992: 601). In such a situation, one is not sure about the actual reason or reasons for them to choose to act, or predict another person to act in a given way. It is important to note here that the present study, like Mansor's, in general does not really reveal the real reasons for the choice the subjects make. The choices that are provided in the questionnaire enable us only to make some general speculation about the possible reasons that might have influenced them.

Table 3.1: Situations of Value Conflict, Choices of Ethnic Preference and Other Interests

a. Ethnic Preference Versus Self-Interest (Material Kind)

Question Concerning:	Ethnic Preference	Self-interest (material)
1. Shopping	At Cheng San's	At Jaafar's
2. House keys	Door unlocked	Malay neighbour
3. Renting out House	Unoccupied	Malay tenant
4. Child-minding	No to Malay	Yes to Malay

b. Ethnic Preference Versus Self-Interest (Status Kind)

Question Concerning:	Ethnic Preference	Self-interest (status)
1. The zoo trip	Ah Chuan	Nasir
2. Skin complexion	Darker-skin	Fairer-skin
3. Child adoption	Chinese child	Indian child
4. Wedding invite	Leong's	Hamid's
5. Ah Siew-Malay manager relationship	Disapprove	Approve

c. Ethnic Preference Versus Personal Obligation

Question Concerning	Ethnic Preference	Personal Obligation
1. Indian friend's party	No	Yes
2. Support Malay boss	No	Yes
3. Child's playmate	No	Yes
4. Mix marriage	No	Yes
5. Bringing Malay friend home	No	Yes
6. Candidate for office boy	No	Yes

d. Ethnic Preference Versus Religious Obligation

Question Concerning	Ethnic Preference	Religious Obligation
1. The treasurer's post	Chuah/Yap	Lee
2. The Students' Union election	Ah Huat/ Ah Chong	Ah Hock

Here one may consider how the measurement can be inconsistent or inaccurate contrary to the 'face value' of the choices provided in this study. First, take for example the choice of shopping. The subjects may predict that Tan Seng Seng or his mother would shop at Cheng San's, who is a Chinese, and not at Jaafar's, who is a Malay. This prediction does not necessarily mean that the act is motivated by the Chinese ethnic preference of Tan Seng Seng or his mother. This choice of action, on the contrary, can be because Tan Seng Seng and his mother might think that they can easily purchase products that suit their Chinese taste and cultural tradition when they shop at their own ethnic shop. If this is the actual reason, then it cannot be looked upon as showing favouritism towards his own ethnic person, and or dislike of different ethnic members, although it does indicate a taste for food of an ethnically defined kind. It could also be 'materialistic' if he thought he would be treated better in the long run by his co-ethnic shop owner, for example, in matters of credit.

In the same manner, in deciding whose wedding invitation to accept first, Tan Seng Seng might decide to go to Leong, who is a Chinese but only a storekeeper in status and later to Hamid's, who is a Malay, but a company director. Tan Seng Seng might find that this arrangement goes well with his intention to save time and energy, or with other arrangements, like wanting to spend more time at Hamid's house for some other reasons. This shows that the underlying reason for Tan Seng Seng's decision to go to Leong's first

may not necessarily be influenced by his ethnic consideration, and as such cannot be interpreted as an act of ethnic loyalty. In the same way, it is either a straightforward indication of a status consideration overpowering ethnic preference if Tan Seng Seng chooses to give preference to his Malay friend, who is company director.

The above examples certainly demonstrate that though the actions of any person like Tan Seng Seng may outwardly look ethnically motivated, in actual fact it may not be the case. Similarly, in other contexts, an act that outwardly does not look ethnically inclined, does not necessarily mean that ethnic sentiment or the identity of a person has become weak with comparison to other practical individual interests. The reasons and the ways in which people choose to act in various real interethnic situations at the personal level can be a complex situation for one to identify unequivocally the real value, interest or aim that motivates one's choice of action. This means that the observer's speculative reason for ethnic preferences and other choices can nevertheless be a wrong judgement.

The above problem of measurement probably cannot be eliminated totally in this kind of questionnaire-based survey. Some measures that can minimise to some degree the difficulty in interpreting the choices among the subjects have been taken. First, by explaining to the subjects in a covering letter the general aim of the research and the

conflicting interests that are presented in the hypothetical social situations, a general guidance is provided in understanding the conflicting interests presented in each question. By explaining the general context of the hypothetical situations, it is hoped that the subjects would make an interpretation, without drifting too far from the actual meaning of the choices represented, or more precisely of the influence they believe would take priority on Tan Seng Seng's choice of action in a particular social situation. With these guide-lines the subjects are expected to predict Tan Seng Seng's choice of action in the proper intended social context of this research.

Secondly, the hypothetical situations have also been formulated in such a way that the inherent context of the situation of value conflict can be conveyed. Apart from clarity in understanding the conflicting values, the formulation of different interethnic hypothetical situations have also taken into consideration that these situations can actually happen. This is important to avoid any unrealistic impressions from the subjects on the situations, and consequently, on their reactions.

5. General Propositions

Some kind of general proposition on how Malaysians of Chinese ethnic origin in general will align themselves in the above mentioned situations of value conflict can be useful for further discussion and understanding of

interethnic relations in Malaysia. These general assumptions provide a basic rationale which can be compared and tested against views the subjects actually express on the Chinese' ethnic preference behaviour i.e via how they thought an imagined ethnic representative, Tan Seng Seng and his other family members, would make decisions in situations where ethnic preference is challenged by motivations of self-interest or personal obligation.

One of the factors that probably comes to the mind of other Malaysians about Chinese in Malaysia more frequently and immediately, is that they are believed to possess a strong motivation and ability to strive for economic success. In actual fact, the Chinese in Malaysia do involve themselves extensively in business activities and in other modern economic sectors, like manufacturing, construction and trade. These sectors obviously give them better monetary earnings and other material wealth, including investment power, compared to other Malaysians, mainly the Malays who predominantly work in agriculture, industrial production, and governmental administration. The success of the Chinese has a strong impact on the belief others form about their personality, attitudes and priority in their everyday lives. The success stories of Chinese individuals like Loh Boon Siew (a Honda dealer), the Teo family (a rice dealer, known as 'rice king of Malaysia'),. and many others in the various states of Malaysia (see Jesudason, 1990: 34-36) are in fact a constant reminder of how hard-working the Chinese are and of their strong business-minded attitude. In general, it can

be said that the Chinese are closely associated with a strong materially-minded personality.

It will not be much of a surprise in Malaysia if someone from the other ethnic communities say that 'If you throw a Chinese anywhere, he will surely survive'. Many Malaysians are aware of the existence of 'China towns' as business centres in other countries. This strengthens the above belief about the Chinese in general among many Malaysians, so much so that quite often any Chinese man in Malaysia may generally and humorously be referred to as *towkays*. Colloquially, the term means a person who runs a business. This implies that the businessman identity has been perceived as an integral part of Chinese personality. The Chinese economic self-interest of a material kind could have been perceived by others as being the foremost factor in their lives to guarantee their success in doing business in other countries as well as in Malaysia. The Chinese have also been observed to encourage and train their children to participate continually in family businesses and to improve them.

For this reason, not only may others strongly believe that the Chinese possess a very strong materially-minded personality, but they themselves may also think so. With such beliefs about the Chinese, one could predict that the latter's choice for self-interest of a material kind may strongly influence and take preference whenever it comes into conflict with their ethnic preference.

However, it is rather difficult to think that Chinese ethnic preference will always take second place. It is not too much to think otherwise about members of an ethnic group which has strong pride in its cultural tradition and civilisation, as well as practising them for generations and continuously trying to defend them via political mobilisation. Ethnic identity and sentiments do strongly influence them and play an important part in their everyday life. In reality, political power, cultural survival and economic success are all connected. In Malaysia, the Chinese always feel strongly about safeguarding their cultural tradition as well as their political survival via their representative political parties and associations. One would have seen this from the importance and sensitivity that the issues of language and education have created among the Chinese in Malaysia since before Independence. Socio-culturally, the Chinese religious teachings like Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, and the ancient Chinese cultural tradition have always been an important factor in maintaining a strong family bond among the community. As such, the ethnic identity and loyalty among the Chinese in Malaysia is not necessarily diminishing in all areas of interethnic relationships. One cannot anticipate that it will always take a marginal role among individuals in all the situations of value conflict they face.

Data Collection

In this study, apart from using a different imagined ethnic representative (Tan Seng Seng) to estimate the strength of Chinese ethnic loyalty, or identity, the nature is distinctly different from Mansor's in terms of the sample and the method used for data collection.

Sample

The present research chooses to study the perceptions held by the Malays and the Chinese in Malaysia. This is because these two ethnic groups together form about 80% of the total population of the country. Divisions and relationships between these two groups have been major influences on the issues and discussions of ethnic relations in Malaysia. They hold the core position in the issues concerning ethnic relations between the *bumiputra* and non-*bumiputra*, or between the Malays and non-Malays in the country.

Mansor, in his study of Malay ethnic alignment, has used a sample of Malays and Chinese from the suburban residence of Petaling Jaya. In contrast, with the intention of drawing a group of samples from a wider society, the present study has chosen Malay and Chinese off-campus degree course students who were studying in 1992 at the University Science Malaysia, Penang. These students, who are pursuing courses in Social Science, Humanities and Science, come from different parts of Malaysia, and they represent the Malay, Chinese, Indian and other indigenous groups in Malaysia.

They enrol as part-time mature students, after securing a job and income. They are employees in the public and private sectors, mostly in the former, and a handful are engaged in their own businesses.

As mature students with a relatively better educational level and wider exposure to modern-urban lives and occupations, they generally can be said to represent the characteristics of the modern-urban population of Malaysian society. As such, they are relatively better aware of the politically sensitive nature of ethnic relations in Malaysia. Through their everyday personal lives in the workplace, and as students which encompass interactions with different ethnic groups, they are in fact at the forefront in experiencing interethnic relations in Malaysia, as well in understanding, assessing and estimating one another's behaviour in various social situations of value conflict.

Taken from the university's off-campus student registration list, Malay and Chinese students were listed according to their ethnic names and their sex before the systematic random sampling method was employed to select a sample of 500 of them, with equal numbers of Malays and Chinese, males and females (125 in each category). Out of this, 318 students (Malay males, 85; Malay females, 77; Chinese males, 79; Chinese females, 77) have responded to the study based on mail questionnaires[1]. The questionnaires were sent out

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[1] There are 5 other replied questionnaires which have not been included because they are from individuals of Indian ethnic background which is not part of this study. Since

during the first week of July, 1992 and continually collected till the end of September 1992.

Questionnaire

After considering the sensitivity of the subject matter studied there seems little doubt of the advantage of using the mail self-completion questionnaire instead of the face-to-face interview method to collect data. My own earlier research experience in studying the subject of mixed marriages (1983), has convinced me that issues related to ethnic relations in Malaysia are not an easy matter for the subjects to expose their views openly. More often, the respondents would take a moderate attitude in their responses in a formal, face-to-face research contact. People's 'true' ethnic feelings and attitudes cannot be measured directly but can only be inferred from what they say and do. But their behaviour too can be a pretence. It is probably common in any multiethnic society that some issues may be considered a personal or private matter. As far as the Malaysian experience is concerned, ethnic issues in general have also come to be treated as personal secrets to a certain extent because of their political sensitivity. A brief clarification of the sensitivity of the subject matter would justify why the mail questionnaire method was used.

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these 5 are Muslims, and carry Malay-Muslim names in the registration list, I could not foretell their ethnic origin before sending the questionnaires out.

Since the incident of the communal riots of May 13th. 1969, the Government of Malaysia has officially defined ethnic issues as politically sensitive, and believes that the people's freedom of expression in this matter should be limited or controlled. The incident, which was partly caused by free expressions of slogans of hatred, encouraged the government of Malaysia to introduce "Limited Democracy" in order to accommodate existing ethnic diversity, interest and sensitivity in the country (Goh, 1971; Malaysia, 1969; 1971)[2].

Together with this official view, real measures are taken for the purpose of monitoring and maintaining the "Limited Democracy". These include the implementation of the Sedition Act, more vigorous actions under the Internal Security Act, and controlling of the media. It can be said that these forceful measures have caused the people to be extremely cautious in expressing their views and attitudes concerning issues of ethnic relations. Open views and attitudes of animosity between ethnic groups become unacceptable in order to maintain political stability and economic growth in implementing the ethnically sensitive New Economic Policy. In any direct face-to-face everyday life contact, expressions of a more tolerant attitude and view have become important strategies of communications among people.

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2 National Operations Council, *The May 13 Tragedy*: A Report (Kuala Lumpur: National Operations Council, 1969). Malaysia, *Towards National Harmony* (Kuala Lumpur, Government Printers, 1971). Goh Cheng Teik, 1971: *The May Thirteenth Incident*, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press).

One may say that academic research is not a political activity of which to be suspicious, and as such, it should enable people to express freely their opinions relating to ethnic matters. But for the people of Malaysia, this may not be the case. As a civil rights Malaysian scholar has put it: '...neither Parliament nor the public is allowed to discuss certain *sensitive issues* pertaining to ethnic relations as contained in the constitutional amendments of 1971. Though it is possible to defend the prohibition from the point of view of the importance of consensus on ethnically-divisive issues, it is nonetheless regrettable that it has led to a general decline in frank and forthright analysis of fundamental social challenges. This is not confined to ethnic relations alone; it covers issues on economic development, human rights and religion. This mood is reflected in the newspapers' (1981: 73)[3].

The people generally will not only become suspicious when questions concerning ethnicity are asked of them, but will also be reluctant to express their frank view openly to avoid being interpreted as a sign of hostility towards any ethnic group or nation. A person of Malay, Chinese, Indian or other ethnic origin has come to consider, by and large, his or her views on ethnic issues and relations in Malaysia as a personal secret and most probably will only express themselves forthrightly in a very informal context, particularly to their own fellow ethnic groups members.

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3 *Aliran Speaks*, Aliran Kesedaran Negara Publication, 1981, Penang, Malaysia.

Realising this fact, and to reduce tolerable kind of answers that please, as well as to reduce the high rate of refusals from respondents, Mansor has used the strategy of using an interviewer of their own ethnic member to question the Chinese and Malay subjects, respectively. However, his ethnic matching strategy has not been able to avoid some refusals (1992: 60-61), which, among other reasons, can be attributed to the sensitivity of the subject matter. Furthermore, it is also still questionable whether this strategy can persuade the subjects to express independently their views concerning ethnically important issues in Malaysia. The subjects interviewed by the respective ethnic interviewer, in a face-to-face contact, are also not totally in an independent position to express their views. This is because in the presence of someone of their own ethnic member (interviewer), the subjects might not want to divulge their personal preference or opinion if they think it does not coincide with that of the majority of their ethnic group.

After considering the relative disadvantages of the interview method, and to reduce further, if not totally, biased responses, the mail self-completion questionnaire method was chosen for two reasons:

(i) Owing to its advantage of anonymity, this method gives the subjects a free hand, and lets them take their own time to express their responses.

(ii) This mail survey also fitted in well with the present research intention of drawing a group of samples which covers a wider geographical area in Malaysia.

The only worry that came to mind when the decision to use the mail questionnaire method was taken was how to elicit a good response. This method is generally believed to result in a lower return rate, although this is not necessarily true in all the research cases, as different factors might influence the rate of response (de Vaus, 1990; Heberlein & Baumgartner, 1978; Jobber, 1984). The response rate, for example, according to de Vaus, "... will be due to the combined effect of the topic, the nature of the sample, the length of the questionnaire, the care taken in implementing the particular survey and other related factors" (1990: 99). It is notable that R.K. Kelsall's study has been reported to have a very high response rate of 84% because the matter studied was both important and of vital interest to the subjects. But since this is not the case with the present study, one has to consider other ways available to facilitate a good response from the sample. This was done through a strong personal appealing and persuasive covering letter, a reminder, and by enclosing stamped addressed envelopes. As a result, 65% of the initially selected sample responded. This can still be considered a good response rate. Among the other reasons for the considerably good response is the subjects' own higher level of education

which might have also created among them a positive attitude towards the importance of the academic research undertaken.

Contents and Sequence of Questionnaire

The questionnaire is made up of three parts:

(a) ***Section A*** consists of questions which are focused on an imagined person, Tan Seng Seng and/or his family members, who are supposed to represent the Chinese ethnic group in Malaysia. These questions, considered as core questions of the study, relate to how the respondent believes Tan Seng Seng and/or his family will behave in different situations of value conflicts.

(b) ***Section B***, which consists of questions on interethnic experiences and the perceptions of interethnic relations and of political attitudes, is aimed at measuring the commonalities and differences among the Chinese and Malay subjects who have reacted to questions about Tan Seng Seng.

(c) ***Section C*** comprises questions on the subjects' background, including their exposure to their own and other ethnic cultural influences and groups.

The questionnaire is arranged and presented to the subjects in the above sequence for one reason. This is because the covering letter which was sent with it, besides explaining the purpose of the research and appealing for co-operation

from the subjects, also particularly explained the context of the core questions asked in Section A, that is, about an imagined person of Malaysian Chinese origin, Tan Seng Seng, in various hypothetical social situations of value conflict. For this reason, in presenting the questionnaire, it was decided to bring the relevant hypothetical questions to the immediate attention of the subjects.

There are other factors which have been taken into consideration before the questionnaire survey was carried out. Firstly, the questionnaire was presented in the Malay language. Being the official and national language, it is a commonly understood language among the various ethnic groups in Malaysia. Secondly, the questionnaire was tested among 20 off-campus students through a pilot study to improve the clarity of the questions before being finally implemented.

Data Analysis

It should be clear that as far as the survey data is concerned, this study will aim at comparing and analysing the strength of Chinese ethnic preference against other interests, in particular self-interest of material and status kinds and personal and religious obligations. This has been measured in terms of how Malaysians of Chinese ethnic origin are perceived to behave in situations of value conflict. However, the Malay and Chinese subjects are not asked to provide scores for each behaviour that they perceived for the imagined Chinese ethnic representatives

presented in the questions. Instead, by asking them to make a choice from categories of actions or conduct provided for Tan Seng Seng or his family members, the subjects have been counted and categorised as nominal data frequency. This data was summarised and analysed by cross-ethnic and gender comparisons, and presented in a form of 2 x 2 between-subjects (Malay and Chinese, male and female) contingency tables for each variable measured. Descriptive percentage and chi-square statistic methods were used in the analysis of the data. The same procedure is employed to analyse the extent of commonalities and differences concerning the interethnic experiences and political attitudes among the students.

Chapter 4

STRENGTH OF ETHNIC PREFERENCE VERSUS SELF-INTEREST

In this, and the following two chapters, we will be exploring three data sets that were collected from the hypothetical questions. These data were collected based on the rational choice model of ethnic behaviour. The assumption is that individuals will act rationally by comparing the relative values of different choices of acts that are available in a particular social context. The difficulty that may be involved in interpreting the choices made by the subjects from the choices provided in these hypothetical questions were argued in chapter 3. We will return to this issue later in the concluding chapter. For the moment, however, in these three chapters the data analysis will be carried out with the assumption that the choices presented in these hypothetical questions do really measure the presumed values or interests (ethnic preference, material and status self-interests and personal obligation).

The specific aim of this chapter is to measure the relative strength of the Chinese ethnic alignment i.e ethnic preference, in relation to the strength of material and status self-interests. This will be examined by looking at the way in which the subjects expect the Chinese ethnic representative actor, Tan Seng Seng, to weigh the importance of ethnic preference against that of material and status self-interests. These self-interests are measured in two forms. First is self-interest of the material kind where the

calculation of monetary or property gains and losses intervene as practical influences. Second is self-interest of the status kind where Tan Seng Seng is expected to consider his gain or loss in terms of social status, respect, or honour when weighed against his consideration of ethnic preference. Both these self-interests represent the influence of universalistic norms in society. We can expect these interests to grow and play an important role in the lives of people in a modern advanced society where individual freedom, economic individualism and consumerism are given greater importance. In the realm of ethnic relations these universalistic norms are expected eventually to weaken the particularistic ethnic-based interests among individuals in the process of economic development and modernisation in a society like Malaysia.

(I). Ethnic Preference Versus Material Interests

The Chinese and Malay subjects were asked the following questions to predict how Tan Seng Seng and his family members would choose to respond in a social situation where the choices of ethnic preference and self-interest of material kind are presumed to be in conflict.

1. Tan Seng Seng has been patronizing Jaafar's grocery shop - noted for its cheapness and nearest to his house. Tan Seng Seng has been informed that in a week's time, Cheng San will be opening a second grocery shop in his neighbourhood.

   i) Where will Tan Seng Seng go?
      [1] Cheng San's shop
      [2] Jaafar's shop
      [3] Other

ii) Where would his mother go?
[1] Cheng San's shop
[2] Jaafar's shop
[3] Other

2. Tan Seng Seng has a house to rent. The house has been left unoccupied for the past six months. A Malay accountant with two young children and his wife want to rent the house. Will Tan Seng Seng accept the Malay tenants or will he refuse and wait for Chinese tenants?

i) What will Tan Seng Seng's reaction be?
[1] Accept
[2] Refuse
[3] Other

ii) What will Tan Seng Seng's mother's reaction be?
[1] Accept
[2] Refuse
[3] Other

3. Tan Seng Seng has a niece whose husband works as a school gardener. Theirs is a big family, living in a small rented Chinese house next to a housing scheme. The wife supplements the meagre earnings of the husband by taking care of four tiny tots. One day a young Malay school teacher came to her house inquiring if she could take care of her one year old son too.

i) Will Tan Seng Seng's niece say yes?
[1] Yes
[2] No
[3] Other

ii) Will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish her grand-daughter to say yes?
[1] Yes
[2] No
[3] Other

4. Tan Seng Seng has to leave his house in a hurry to fetch his own family from the hospital. He has been expecting his sister to come any moment to assist his family, but he has waited as long as he can. He wonders whether to leave his front door unlocked or to leave the housekeys with his next door Malay neighbour.

i) What will Tan Seng Seng do?
[1] Leave the front door unlocked
[2] Leave the keys with his Malay neighbour
[3] Other

ii) What will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish him to do?
[1] Leave the front door unlocked
[2] Leave the keys with his Malay neighbour
[3] Other

The question on *shopping choice* (question 1) tries to suggest to the subjects that Tan Seng Seng (and his mother) may consider continuing to shop at Jaafar's (a Malay) shop and may not want to move to the fellow ethnic, Cheng San's shop. To shop at Jaafar's is presumed to suggest the idea that consideration for material interest is the primary factor. Cheng San's shop can provide the same convenience as Jaafar's only in terms of distance because the shop will be opened in the same neighbourhood. By not making known the prices in Cheng San's shop, there could be only two conflicting factors for the respondents to take into account when deciding what Tan Seng Seng's action will be. These are whether he will shift to his fellow Chinese' shop because of the possible ethnic consideration, or continue to shop at Jaafar's for the material benefit he may gain i.e lower pricing.

If the subjects think that Tan Seng Seng will move to Cheng San's shop, it may appear to indicate two things. Firstly, Tan Seng Seng is willing to sacrifice whatever material benefits that he can gain from cheaper shopping at Jaafar's. Secondly, it also appears to indicate that ethnic consideration is a strong influence not only because of his disregard for gain, or willingness to lose materially, but also for another reason. Tan Seng Seng is also willing to disregard the social familiarity and informal relations that may have developed between him and Jaafar in the course of routine shopping in the same neighbourhood.

The questions on *renting out house* (question 2) to a Malay family and *child-minding* (question 3) also seem to pose a similar kind of conflict of interests between monetary consideration and ethnic preference. The subjects have to take into consideration not only the factor of losing extra income by not accepting the Malay tenant, but also the possibility of losing a good tenant considering that he is an accountant. The prospect for him to pay the rent without delay is fairly good. On the other hand, Tan Seng Seng's house has not been occupied for six months. This means he has already lost so much extra income for that period. If the subjects predict that Tan Seng Seng will refuse the Malay tenant and wait until a Chinese tenant comes, this will indicate his disregard for a material consideration that comes into conflict with ethnic preference.

Similarly, one may expect Tan Seng Seng's niece to consider the extra income that she can earn from her part-time baby sitting job. This is because her husband, as an ordinary gardener, is likely to earn little but on the other hand, having a big family means higher living expenses. A Malay teacher's request for Tan Seng Seng's niece to baby-sit for her son is probably just what she needs to help her family financially. But the subjects may also take into consideration the possibility of Tan Seng Seng's niece refusing to baby-sit for a Malay child because of her ethnic preference, or her dislike of Malays.

The material consideration that presumably comes into conflict with ethnic preference is not necessarily confined to real monetary gains, or losses alone. In some circumstances the very thought of security for the property can also influence a person to behave in a manner that gives priority to material self-interest over ethnic preference. People may seek help from others regardless of their ethnic background to avoid any loss of their possessions. In a situation of emergency, or desperation, one would probably want to protect their property strongly at any cost, even if it means going against feelings of ethnic prejudice, dislike or sentiments. In the case of *housekeys* (question 4), this kind of conflict situation could be perceived by the subjects. Tan Seng Seng had to decide between trusting his Malay neighbour by leaving the housekeys with them, thus avoiding any possibility of theft, or leaving the door unlocked and be prepared to take the risk of a loss in his property. Unless his trust in a neighbour is very ethnically motivated, he would be expected to leave the housekeys with his Malay neighbour regardless of his ethnic differences.

(II) Ethnic Preference Versus Status Interest

People may use various symbols like material objects, life styles, including behaviour, attitudes, taste and speech and type of association, or other symbols that are culturally defined as status symbols. People use these status symbols to reflect the important position of a person in the society that is worthy of approval, respect, or honour from others.

The occupational structure constitutes an important basis for the main division of status among people. This is because one's occupational position is assigned a status for the amount of income it can earn, the wealth a person can accumulate, and other status attributes it can provide. People seek better, or higher status either directly, or indirectly through association with others who possess these status symbols. Status may play an important role in undermining the traditional ethnic sentiments. In measuring the relative strength of ethnic preference against that of their self-interest of status kind, the following four social situations were put to the subjects for their prediction:

1) Tan Seng Seng is arranging marriage for his son to one of his cousin's daughters. Given a choice, whom will his son choose - the fair-skinned elder sister or her darker skinned younger sister?

   i) Whom will Tan Seng Seng's son choose?
      [1] the fair-skinned elder sister
      [2] the darker-skinned younger sister
      [3] other

   ii) Whom would Tan Seng Seng's mother wish her grandson to choose?
      [1] the fair-skinned elder sister
      [2] the darker-skinned younger sister
      [3] other

2. Tan Seng Seng wants to adopt a child. The Social Welfare Department has sent him some forms to be filled and 2 coloured photographs of a fair Indian child and a dark-skinned Chinese child.

   i) Whom will Tan Seng Seng choose?
      [1] the dark-skinned Chinese child
      [2] the fair-skinned Indian child
      [3] other

   ii) Whom would his mother wish him to adopt?
      [1] the dark-skinned Chinese child
      [2] the fair-skinned Indian child
      [3] other

3. Tan Seng Seng is going to take his children to the zoo this coming Sunday. Tan Seng Seng's son has been pestering his father to take along one of his friends on this trip.

   i) Whom would Tan Seng Seng suggest to his son to take along on this trip?
   [1] Nasir, a doctor's son
   [2] Ah Chuan whose mother works as a housemaid
   [3] Other

   i) Whom would Tan Seng Seng's mother wish her grandson to take along on this trip?
   [1] Nasir, a doctor's son
   [2] Ah Chuan whose mother works as a housemaid
   [3] Other

4. Tan Seng Seng received two wedding invitations which happen to fall on the same day. He has to make up his mind as to which wedding he would give priority to attend first.

   i) Whose house will he go to first?
   [1] Hamid's. He is a company director
   [2] Leong's. He is a storekeeper.
   [3] Other

   ii) Whose house will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish him to go to first?
   [1] Hamid's. He is a company director
   [2] Leong's. He is a storekeeper.
   [3] Other

Except the social situation concerning *skin complexion* (1), other social situations - *child adoption* (2), the *zoo trip* (3), and the *wedding invitation* (4), are presumed to pose to the subjects conflicting interest between ethnic preference and status.

Skin colour as an indicator of social status is probably not a good example. It is, however, not totally wrong to say that people do attach some status value to skin colour in many traditional communities, although this may not be apparent among people with liberal attitudes. Fair skin has been regarded in many communities as more desirable, if not

a more beautiful complexion, compared to darker skin, and worthy of admiration or attention. Among other things Chinese, Malays and Indians in Malaysia may show some kind of favourable attitude and satisfaction in having a child, bride, or groom of fairer complexion. It can be said that fair skin, in this regard, has been positively valued and seen as a status symbol.

The question on *skin complexion* was created to see whether the Chinese attached any preference to fair-skinned complexion over dark-skinned complexion as a status symbol within their own ethnic group. The findings will form the basis for measuring the persistence of such an important status factor, if at all it exists, as compared to their ethnic preference in interethnic situations such as in the question of *child adoption* (2).

If the Chinese are presumably predicted as having more of a *status* preference based on skin colour, than the strength of their ethnic alignment in comparison to self-interest of status kind in relation to skin complexion, can be established much more clearly in an interethnic situation. The question on *child adoption* which appears to portray the conflict between ethnic consideration and self-interest of status kind, provides the opportunity to make this observation. If the ethnic representative actor, Tan Seng Seng, is predicted to be influenced by his ethnic preference as an overriding factor in his selection of child adoption, than he may choose a Chinese child with darker skin

complexion in preference to an Indian child with fairer skin.

The question on the *zoo trip* (3) and the *wedding invitation* (4) are presumed to provide another two different social situations where the importance of status that is associated with modern occupations will be tested against consideration for ethnic preference. People attach different status to the various occupations or occupational categories. The higher the occupational ranking, such as the professionals (doctors, lawyers, engineers, company directors, etc.), the higher the status attached, as compared to the workers of the lower strata.

To maintain or gain higher status, it may be expected that people want to associate themselves with people in so-called more prestigious occupations. This desire for status can motivate people to have relations or associations not only with people of their own ethnic kind, but also with other ethnic groups. Some people of lower occupational ranking are expected to take an opportunity to have close associations or relations with people of higher occupational status regardless of their ethnic group background.

For the purpose of maintaining or gaining higher status, one can assume that self-interest of status kind would not only possibly create status relations within the same ethnic group but also across ethnic boundaries. In Malaysia, the relations people form on the basis of status can include the

Malays, Chinese or Indians of the same, or, different status. But will status interest among the Chinese, like Tan Seng Seng, influence them so greatly to the extent that they may undermine their own ethnic sentiments? If Tan Seng Seng is expected to be strongly motivated by his self-interest of a status kind, then the subjects may predict that he will choose to associate himself with people of higher occupational status. But will that be with people of different ethnic groups? Examples of these are taking Nasir, who is a doctor's son, instead of Ah Chuan, who is a fellow Chinese, but whose mother is only a housemaid, on the zoo trip, and to attend first the wedding at Hamid's, who is a company director, instead of Leong's, who is again a fellow Chinese but only a storekeeper.

Findings: Ethnic Preference Material Interests

Shopping Choice

In the case of shopping choice, material interest appears to have a relatively stronger impact than the influence of ethnic preference among the Chinese (Tables 4.1 & 4.2). 78% of the Chinese subjects have predicted to imply that Tan Seng Seng's ethnic preference will not take priority over his material interest of lower-priced shopping. The prediction for the Malay subjects also seem to indicate that greater material self-interest will not influence Tan Seng Seng to change his preference to his fellow Chinese shop. The prediction for both male and female Chinese and Malay subjects also runs parallel to that at group level. More

Malays (28%), particularly the males, than Chinese (14%) are of the opinion that Tan Seng Seng will change his choice to the Chinese shop. This indicates that the Malays have overestimated the influence of ethnic preference among the Chinese. Among the Chinese, more female subjects seem to indicate the ethnic influence than males.

Table 4.1: Shopping Choice by Ethnic Group (%)

	Tan Seng Seng		Tan's Mother	
	Chinese	Malays	Chinese	Malays
Cheng San	14	28	32	68
Jaafar	78	67	54	26
Other	8	5	14	6
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 4.2: Shopping Choice by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Tan Seng Seng				Tan's Mother			
	CM	CF	MM	MF	CM	CF	MM	MF
Cheng San	12	17	33	23	32	33	66	70
Jaafar	82	73	62	72	54	53	28	23
Other	6	10	5	5	14	14	6	7
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Similarly in the case of Tan Seng Seng's mother, the subjects seem to think that material interest would be the foremost important influence, although in her case those who may think so reduced to 54%. In her case, rather more subjects (32%) predicted to imply that she would be more influenced by ethnic preference than Tan Seng Seng. Clearly among the Malays, a substantial shift in opinion seems to

indicate that they have overestimated the ethnic influence, even more so in the case of Tan Seng Seng's mother. 68% of them now think that Tan Seng Seng's mother will want her son to move to his fellow Chinese shop and this could imply that she is willing to forego the lower-price shopping benefit. No significant gender differences were observed, although more Chinese females and Malay males in Tan Seng Seng's case, and Malay males in the case of Tan Seng Seng's mother, incline towards greater ethnic influence.

The results seem to show that for a majority on this question the ethnic preference is not an important influence among the Chinese, including the older generation, when its comes into conflict with material interests. The Malays seem to think alike, although in the case of Tan Seng Seng's mother, they predicted otherwise.

Renting Out House

As in the case of shopping choice, material consideration seem to be a more important factor than ethnic consideration in the case of renting out the house. In this case, however, nearly all the subjects, notably among the Malays, could not seem to perceive any challenge from ethnic consideration (Tables 4.3 & 4.4). 95% of the Chinese and 99% of the Malay subjects think that Tan Seng Seng will rent out his house to the Malay tenant for the possible income gained from the rent. In the social context that is formal and impersonal in

nature, self-interest seems to be absolutely the most reasonable and practical consideration for subjects.

Table 4.3: Renting Out House by Ethnic Group (%)

	Tan Seng Seng		Tan's Mother	
	Chinese	Malays	Chinese	Malays
Accept	95	99	73	75
Refuse	4	1	21	21
Other	1	0	6	4
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 4.4: Renting Out House by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Tan Seng Seng				Tan's Mother			
	CM	CF	MM	MF	CM	CF	MM	MF
Accept	96	93	99	99	75	71	73	77
Refuse	3	7	1	1	18	24	25	18
Other	1	0	0	0	7	5	2	5
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

In his mother's case, there seems to exist some degree of reluctance to ignore totally the possible influence of ethnic preference. A big majority of the Chinese (73%) and Malay (75%) subjects, however, still indicate that Tan Seng Seng's mother also will want her son to go ahead with renting the house to the Malay tenant. No gender differences were observed, although slightly more Malay males (in the case of Tan Seng Seng's mother) and Chinese females appear to indicate the possible influence of the ethnic consideration.

Compared to the first case, the younger Chinese generation do not seem to be at all influenced by ethnic preference. Only a small minority of the subjects think that concern for ethnic preference would influence the older generation of Chinese.

Child-Minding

The case of child-minding is another business setting, but more informal to a certain degree. In this situation, ethnic preference does not seem to exert a strong influence, but the subjects did not seem to ignore it almost completely, as in the case of renting out house. The subjects' response is very much similar to that of the case of shopping choice (Tables 4.5 & 4.6). 76% of the Chinese subjects seem to have emphasised material interest as an overriding influence by indicating that Tan Seng Seng's niece will accept to baby-sit for the Malay child. The Malay subjects also seem to think likewise with 64% indicating this. But again, as in the case of the shopping choice, the Malay respondents were rather more inclined than the Chinese to think that Tan Seng Seng would act in accordance with ethnic preference. By thinking so, they have again overestimated the ethnic influence among the Chinese. No gender differences were observed in both the Chinese and Malay groups.

The ethnic consideration seems to have been more influential in the case of Tan Seng Seng's mother and reduced the Chinese' prediction of material interest to 62%. Among the

Malays, the subjects seem to have a reverse opinion in indicating greater ethnic consideration (56%) instead of material benefit (36%). As such, their overestimation of ethnic influence among the older generation of Chinese becomes even greater. The Chinese female and Malay male seem to think that Tan Seng Seng and his mother would act in accord with ethnic preference. No significant gender differences were observed.

Table 4.5: Child Minding by Ethnic Group (%)

	Tan Seng Seng		Tan's Mother	
	Chinese	Malays	Chinese	Malays
Yes	76	64	62	36
No	17	30	28	56
Other	7	6	10	8
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 4.6: Child Minding by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Tan Seng Seng				Tan's Mother			
	CM	CF	MM	MF	CM	CF	MM	MF
Yes	77	75	65	64	64	59	31	43
No	15	20	30	30	23	33	62	49
Other	8	5	5	6	13	8	7	8
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Housekeys

In the case of housekeys, the subjects' responses were much the same as that of the case of renting-out the house. The influence of material interest again seems to be the

overwhelming influence among the Chinese and the Malay subjects, i.e. 97% and 95% respectively have predicted that Tan Seng Seng will choose to leave the housekeys with his Malay neighbour (Tables 4.7 & 4.8).

Table 4.7: Housekeys by Ethnic Group (%)

	Tan Seng Seng		Tan's Mother	
	Chinese	Malays	Chinese	Malays
Unlocked	1	2	5	7
Neighbour	97	95	89	86
Other	2	3	6	7
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 4.8: Housekeys by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Tan Seng Seng				Tan's Mother			
	CM	CF	MM	MF	CM	CF	MM	MF
Unlocked	3	0	1	3	6	2	5	9
Neighbour	96	97	93	97	89	90	85	87
Other	1	3	6	0	5	8	10	4
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

This appears to imply that the subjects have in their minds the possibility of material loss through a break-in as an important consideration for Tan Seng Seng not to leave the door unlocked. Instead, seeking the help of a Malay neighbour by leaving the housekeys with them to look after the security of the property in an emergency situation seems to overrule whatever ethnic consideration or ethnic prejudice he may have towards different ethnic members of the community.

Even in predicting the responses of the older generation, the Malay and Chinese subjects do not seem to indicate any significant differences from that of Tan Seng Seng. The Malay and Chinese subjects predicted by 86% and 89% respectively the possibility of material interest in the case of Tan Seng Seng's mother. No gender differences were observed in Tan Seng Seng and in his mother's case for both the Malay and Chinese groups.

Summary

Concern for ethnic preference did not seem to be the important influence among the Chinese when this influence is presumed to come into conflict with material self-interest as defined by the hypothetical questions. In all the social situations, as indicated through Tan Seng Seng's and his mother's choice of behaviour, the Chinese subjects strongly supported behaviour that seem to be consistent with material interest, rather than with ethnic preference, as posed by the hypothetical dilemma.

The traditional-minded older generation seems to have an equal concern for 'material gain and loss'. This was indicated in shopping choice (54%), renting-out house (73%), child- minding (62%) and leaving housekeys with Malay neighbours (89%). Both the Chinese males and females emphasised, with almost equal strength, the importance of material interest in all the above situations for both Tan Seng Seng and his mother. There exists only a small gender

difference in both cases. This does not allow a meaningful discussion of the differences between genders.

The Malays, both the male and female subjects, seem to have a good judgement in predicting how the Chinese would act when their hypothetical economic interests were pitted against ethnic preferences. Similar to but rather less than the Chinese' prediction, the Malays seem to have indicated that the material interests would overrule any consideration for ethnic preference in all the situations that concerned Tan Seng Seng. In the case of Tan Seng Seng's mother, the Malays' prediction went contrary to the Chinese in two cases in which concern for ethnic preference seems to have overruled material interest (shopping and child-minding).

Findings: Ethnic Preference versus Status Interests

Skin Complexion

Among the Chinese subjects, a substantial 41% could not disclose their choices in the case of skin complexion. But, on the other hand, most of them predicted fair skin complexion as the preferred choice. This was indicated by 55% of them (Tables 4.9 & 4.10). More convincingly, the Malays compared to the Chinese subjects, have indicated what they might see as Chinese status interests with 75% expecting the actor to choose a bride with fairer skin compared to 5% for darker skin. Consistently, from a range of the highest at 87% to the lowest at 58%, the male and female subjects across the ethnic groups predicted the

selection in favour of fair skin, as against dark skin (between 2% to 7%). No significant gender difference was observed. The preference for fair skin over darker skin has been predicted much more strongly in the choice of Tan Seng Seng's mother (62% among Chinese and 83% among Malays).

Table 4.9: Skin Complexion by Ethnic Group (%)

	Tan Seng Seng		Tan's Mother	
	Chinese	Malays	Chinese	Malays
Fair Skin	55	75	62	83
Dark Skin	4	5	5	4
Other	41	20	33	13
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 4.10: Skin Complexion by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Tan Seng Seng				Tan's Mother			
	CM	CF	MM	MF	CM	CF	MM	MF
Fair Skin	58	51	79	70	63	61	87	78
Dark Skin	5	4	3	7	6	4	2	6
Other	37	45	18	23	31	35	11	16
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The findings seem to indicate that skin complexion does matter as a status symbol among the Chinese, and even more, among the older generation. A fair skin complexion does seem to carry a higher status implication within the Chinese group. The Malays also appear to understand the Chinese preference for status gain and even have rated the Chinese status interest higher than the Chinese own estimation. If

the preference for fair skin, as disclosed by the above results, can be taken to be motivated by self-interest of a status kind, than the strength of this motivation can now be compared to that of ethnic preference in the following case of child adoption.

Child Adoption

In the case of child adoption (Tables 4.11 & 4.12), the subjects' responses do not seem to show the importance attached to self-interests of a status kind. Instead, the selection in favour of the ethnic preference is predicted. This is indicated by 82% of the Chinese subjects in the case of Tan Seng Seng and 83% in the case of his mother who thinks that Tan Seng Seng will choose to adopt a fellow Chinese although the child has a darker complexion compared to the Indian child. More Chinese female subjects, across the generations (88% to 91%) have predicted in a way that implies that ethnic consideration has a much more important influence than fair skin or self-interest of a status kind.

Table 4.11: Child Adoption by Ethnic Group (%)

	Tan Seng Seng		Tan's Mother	
	Chinese	Malays	Chinese	Malays
Dark Chinese	82	70	83	86
Fair Indian	10	21	6	10
Other	8	9	11	4
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 4.12: Child Adoption by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Tan Seng Seng				Tan's Mother			
	CM	CF	MM	MF	CM	CF	MM	MF
Dark Chinese	76	88	64	77	75	91	88	83
Fair Indian	11	9	28	14	9	4	8	13
Other	13	3	8	9	16	5	4	4
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Likewise, the majority of the Malay subjects (70%) do not seem to underestimate the importance of ethnic consideration among the Chinese. They seem to indicate the influence even higher in the case of Tan Seng Seng (86%). A higher percentage of female subjects (77%) than their male counterparts (64%) have predicted that the ethnic factor will be an important influence.

The findings indicate that in the daily lives, within their own group, the Chinese may be influenced by status consideration (as in the case of skin complexion); but such a consideration does not seem to take greater priority in the case of child adoption where they have to make a selection between ethnic and status preference. In this case ethnic preference appears to be the overriding influence. Although the Malay subjects seem to understand this, they have in this case underestimated the ethnic influence among the Chinese. While the Chinese seem to think that the strength of ethnic preference influence would be the same for both Tan Seng Seng and his mother, the Malays, on the other hand, seem to think that Tan Seng Seng's mother will

be more influenced by ethnic preference choice than Tan Seng Seng. The possibility of ethnic influence taking priority over status interest has been indicated with a greater strength by the female subjects than the male subjects.

Zoo Trip

As the result of the *zoo trip* indicates, the status interest again seems to be perceived by the subjects, both Malays and Chinese, as not an important factor compared to that of ethnic interest (Tables 4.13 & 4.14). Among the Chinese, 66% have indicated that Tan Seng Seng will choose Ah Chuan, a Chinese but a housemaid's son, to go to the zoo with his son. Only 18% indicate to imply that Tan Seng Seng may act in accordance with status interest by taking Nasir, whose father is a doctor, to go with his son to the zoo.

The Malay subjects, too, but with a lower percentage (57%) have predicted that Tan Seng Seng will make an ethnic preference choice rather than self interest of status kind. No significant gender differences were observed among the Malays and Chinese.

Table 4.13: Zoo Trip by Ethnic Group (%)

	Tan Seng Seng		Tan's Mother	
	Chinese	Malays	Chinese	Malays
Nasir	18	29	18	10
Ah Chuan	66	57	69	78
Other	16	14	13	12
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 4.14: Zoo Trip by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Tan Seng Seng				Tan's Mother			
	CM	CF	MM	MF	CM	CF	MM	MF
Nasir	17	19	32	26	15	21	12	8
Ah Chuan	68	64	58	57	71	66	78	79
Other	15	17	10	17	14	13	10	13
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

In Tan Seng Seng's mother's case, the ethnic consideration again seems to have indicated a much stronger influence than that of self-interest of a status kind. The Chinese and Malay subjects, 69% and 78%, respectively, have predicted that his mother preferred her grandson to choose Ah Chuan to go with him. No gender differences were observed among these groups.

The findings show that in this group of questions the Chinese seem to have attached greater importance to the ethnic preference than status interest. The ethnic preference seems to have a greater influence upon the older generation. While the Malays appear to recognise the ethnic influence, they have underestimated the strength of Chinese ethnic preference in Tan Seng Seng's case but in his mother's case, they overestimated it.

Wedding Invitation

In contrast to the two results above, both the Chinese and Malay subjects seem to have revealed that Tan Seng Seng will

choose to give a slightly higher priority to self-interest of a status kind in the case of the wedding invitation. The Chinese predicted by 42% that Tan Seng Seng will be attending the wedding function at Hamid's, a company director, first, instead of Leong's who is a fellow Chinese but only a storekeeper (Tables 4.15 & 4.16). 35% preferred to indicate otherwise to stress that the presumed ethnic preference may override status interest. The prediction of the Chinese male subjects on the other hand, seems to indicate that ethnic consideration is likely to override their concern for status gain by associating with someone belonging to a higher status group. This is indicated by 44% as against 37% for status interest.

Table 4.15: Wedding Invitation by Ethnic Group (%)

	Tan Seng Seng		Tan's Mother	
	Chinese	Malays	Chinese	Malays
Hamid's	42	55	25	16
Leong's	35	36	53	76
Other	23	9	22	8
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 4.16: Wedding Invitation by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Tan Seng Seng				Tan's Mother			
	CM	CF	MM	MF	CM	CF	MM	MF
Hamid's	37	48	59	51	22	29	16	16
Leong's	44	25	37	34	58	48	77	75
Other	19	27	4	15	20	23	7	9
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Among the Malay subjects, a higher proportion (55%), compared to the Chinese subjects, have predicted in a way that implies that Tan Seng Seng's preference would be motivated by status interest, and 36% by ethnic interest. No significant gender difference was observed.

In contrast to the prediction on Tan Seng Seng's choice, the subjects seem to be convinced that his mother will not be influenced by self-interest of status kind. The Chinese subjects (53%) have predicted that Tan Seng Seng's mother will want her son to give priority to his fellow Chinese wedding invitation. A much higher percentage (76%) among the Malays seem to have indicated the ethnic influence. Gender differences in both ethnic groups are insignificant.

The findings would seem to indicate that in a situation like the wedding invitation, status interest may override any concern for ethnic consideration. But among the older generation the concern for ethnic preference still seems to hold priority. The Malays seem to have estimated the Chinese ethnic preference accurately in Tan Seng Seng's case but in the case of his mother, they have overestimated it.

Summary

In the three social situations (*child adoption, zoo trip, wedding invitation*), it is presumed that self-interest of status kind is in conflict with ethnic preference. It is only in the case of *wedding invitation* that a marginally

higher percentage of the Chinese subjects are of the opinion that status interest rather than ethnic consideration will be an important consideration. Although in the social situation of *skin complexion*, the subjects seem to indicate that status interest will be an important consideration for the Chinese, this status that is associated with, or derived from, fair skin does not seem to be sustained when it comes into conflict with concern for ethnic preference. This was proved in the case of *child adoption*.

The status that is derived from associating with people of a higher occupational status seems to take a slightly higher importance among the Chinese, as indicated in the case of wedding invitation. But such occupational status consideration was not indicated in the case of the *zoo trip*.

Ethnic consideration traditionally exerts a greater influence among the older generation. Although within their own ethnic group, the status interest seems to have a greater influence among the older generation, as indicated in the case of skin complexion (83%), the influence never seems to override their concern for ethnic preference in interethnic contexts.

There is not much difference in the prediction between the genders for both Tan Seng Seng and his mother. However, in the case of the wedding invitation, the Chinese males seem

to have predicted ethnic consideration as an overriding influence, contrary to the overall prediction of the group, which seems to emphasise the status interest as the overriding influence.

The Malays' prediction did not differ much from that of the Chinese. The Malay subjects too seem to think that the ethnic preference would exert a greater influence in most instances among both the younger and older generations of the Chinese.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the relative strength of ethnic preference behaviour seem to support the fact that the act of ethnic alignment among the Chinese is weaker in relation to the hypothetical influence of material self-interests. But in the social situations of value conflict, in which presumably ethnic consideration comes into conflict with self-interest of a status kind, different trends begin to emerge. Status interest, unlike self-interest of the material kind, is incapable of exerting a very strong influence, to an extent that it can undermine or reduce ethnic sentiments.

The findings for both sets of questions - (i) where ethnic preference is set against material self-interest; (ii) where ethnic preference is set against status interest - show that individuals may attach different degrees of importance to different self-interests (material and status) and therefore

this may account for the acts of displacing or emphasising ethnic preference in different circumstances. But there was also observable variation in the emphasis on ethnic considerations within each set of circumstances. The subjects' responses seem to show that they have attached different degrees of importance to the ethnic consideration in different social situations within each set of circumstances. These differences in the emphasis on the acts of ethnic preference between and within different sets of social circumstances invite us to look closely into the very nature of the relationship involved in these social situations in which ethnicity may or may not take relevance. This perhaps could further explain why in different circumstances the subjects appear to have acted differently. Varying social contexts seem to have created different degrees of urgency or relevance with regards to ethnicity and other interests among the Chinese subjects.

In the first set of social circumstances, i.e ethnic preference versus material self-interest, all the presumed materially-oriented behaviour are supported by more than 75% of the Chinese subjects. However, to leave the housekeys with a Malay neighbour and to rent the house out to a Malay family, has been given more approval (97% and 95% respectively) compared to shopping and child-minding (78% and 76%, respectively). Among the possible reasons is that the material interests may have become more profound in the first two instances. At the very personal level, probably no person is prepared to take any action risking the loss of

property when the house is left unlocked, or foregoing monetary gain from the house rent by refusing a good tenants. On the other hand, the housekey situation is so trivial involving no ethnic sensitivities, and in the case of renting the property, it is purely a commercial transaction. For a landlord like Tan Seng Seng, he will be more concerned about losing income from rent than looking for co-ethnic tenant. In matters of shopping and child-minding, on the other hand, the situations do not seem to have created the same magnitude of desire for material benefit and child-minding is closer to family concerns.

In terms of ethnic preference, the Chinese have given a very low priority to the question of housekeys (1%), and renting out the house (4%), shopping choice (14%) and child-minding (17%). The type of social relationships involved in these social contexts are of a more formal and impersonal kind, although the degree may differ between these inter-personal interactions. In these various formal kind of business dealings at the interpersonal interactions, ethnic identity, or ethnicity, will be hardly perceived as a 'bargaining' issue in the transactions. These social contexts do not have much direct relevance to ethnicity or being considered as an appropriate avenue for individuals to act according to particularistic norms of ethnic consideration.

There may also be other reasons why the subjects almost refuse to think of any substantial ethnic influence, notably in the case of housekeys. The Government, through a local

neighbourhood scheme called the *Rukun Tetangga*, which is repeatedly shown on the television screen, could have created more awareness among the people, most specifically encouraging people to trust and leave housekeys with their neighbours, regardless of ethnic background, to avoid any unwanted incidents of loss of property or theft.

On the other hand, in a more personal and exclusive kind of business activity, like taking care of the only Chinese baby in the family, or when their action may have meant rendering support to their own ethnic group members' business, ethnic consideration seems to have aroused more attention among the Chinese. In the case of child-minding, the other important factor to be considered is the difficulty that may arise for a Chinese person to conform to Muslim religious taboos if she, or he, decided to baby-sit for a Malay baby. One of the main obstacles is food. The Malays, for example, strictly do not eat pork nor keep dogs. But eating pork and keeping dogs are common features in the Chinese family. This may exert a certain degree of constraint on a Chinese person if he or she has to look after a Malay baby in their own house. The Malays too, will normally be reluctant to ask a Chinese family to baby-sit for them unless the circumstance is a formal nursery.

In the case of shopping choice, the relationship between the Malay businessperson (Jaafar) and the Chinese customer (Tan Seng Seng) should be more of a secondary and formal kind. But again, running a business in a neighbourhood may bring

about familiarity and friendly relations between a person who is running a grocery shop and a routine customer. This may reduce consideration based on ethnic differences between them. Tan Seng Seng may not only consider the material benefit from shopping at Jaafar's shop but also the familiarity and friendship factors. But the consideration of helping one's own ethnic small business (like Cheng San's) can run high in a society like Malaysia, where the Chinese and Indians are well aware of the governmental policy to help Malay business, including the availability of loans for them to open small-scale business such as a grocery shop.

Contrarily, in the second set of circumstances (against self-interest of status kind), due to the nature of the hypothetical situations, ethnic preference seems to have exerted a greater influence in all the situations observed. Comparing the different degrees of emphasis on status and ethnic interests between these social situations, one can see that in the situation of *child adoption*, the Chinese appear to be much more ethnically inclined and reduce status consideration to a much lesser degree than in the case of the *zoo trip*, and the *wedding invitation*. Even though child adoption does occur, it will be unusual to think of this as a common phenomenon. This is even more so when it comes to adopting a child from a different ethnic group. When a child is adopted, he or she will be integrated into the adoptive family and the child is expected to become an integral member of that family and to identify with it. The process involved in integrating a child from another ethnic group

can be perceived to be more difficult. Traditionally, a family is a social unit that is created through the practice of endogamous marriage norms based on the sameness of ethnic origin and culture.

The process of adopting and integrating a child into the traditionally ethnic-based family unit can be assumed to be very much influenced by the idea of sameness of ethnicity among the family members. The family that wants to adopt a child from a different ethnic group presumably will also come to think about the awkward situation and constraints that they might have to face in bringing up and integrating the child who will grow up to have different features, but within its ethnic social surroundings. This has most likely reduced the importance of status that can be derived from fair skin, where a Chinese person adopts an Indian child. On the other hand, the pressure to maintain the traditional family feature as an ethnically endogamous unit could be an important factor for the Chinese to adopt a Chinese child. This is quite clearly reflected in the preference for one's own ethnic child by the female group who traditionally play a major role in bringing up the children by showing a much higher support for their own ethnic child than their male counterparts, as seen with both Tan Seng Seng and his mother.

In the case of *the zoo trip*, again the nature of the situation is more likely to undermine the status interest as an attractive influence compared to ethnic preference. In

this case, only slightly more of the subjects (18%) seem to consider status as an important factor, compared to the case of *child adoption* (10%) which is a much more serious family matter than the case of the *zoo trip*. What is interesting to note here is that status does seem to influence the Chinese, as seen in the case of the *wedding invitation*. Association with someone from a higher rank professionally seems to confer status gains. But such status considerations cannot be assumed to persist in other situations, for instance in the case of the *zoo trip*, where the same occupational factor is involved. In this case, status interest is not an overriding important factor for Tan Seng Seng to take along Nasir, a doctor's son.

The *zoo trip*, as indicated, is also a family-related situation as is *child adoption*. When Tan Seng Seng's son insists on taking a friend, the question of managing and taking responsibility over this friend becomes an important factor to be taken into account rather than merely status satisfaction. Tan Seng Seng's son's friend, Ah Chuan, probably becomes a better choice than Nasir because, being a fellow Chinese, he is thought to be managed much more easily. The problem involved is similar to the one in the case of child-minding. Ah Chuan will eat the same food without any problems, understand the same dialect and other cultural expressions, unlike someone from another ethnic group. Nasir, although a doctor's son in status, being a Malay and a Muslim will perhaps add more pressure and

difficulties to Tan Seng Seng's family outing, which should be relaxed and enjoyable.

The *wedding invitation* which is a very much different affair from that of *child adoption* and the *zoo trip*, perhaps offers a better opportunity for the Chinese to enjoy the status satisfaction derived from it. Unlike *child adoption* and the *zoo trip*, the *wedding invitation* is to a formal social function where a certain standard of behaviour is always expected from those attending it. People are invited for the function because they are considered to have an important relationship either with the bride or groom, or their families. Being a traditional function, people of the same ethnic group usually make up the gathering. If someone other than their own ethnic members are invited, it is only because he or she is considered to be of importance, more so, when the invitation comes from people of higher status, like Hamid, who is a company director. This situation presumably is thought by the Chinese to give better status satisfaction. A small majority of the Chinese subjects predicted that Tan Seng Seng would give priority to the wedding function at Hamid's instead of Leong's, even though a fellow Chinese.

Apart from the different nature of the social situations, this survey showed that ethnic consideration has also exerted a greater influence among the older generation of Chinese like Tan Seng Seng's mother. In relation to the circumstances of material interests, ethnic preference seems

to have a greater influence among the older generation of Chinese in comparison with the younger age-group (Tan Seng Seng); (shopping choice, 32% against 14%; renting out house, 21% against 4%; child-minding, 28% against 17%; housekey, 5% against 1%). In the circumstances contrasted with status interests, a much stronger ethnic influence is indicated, but not much different from the prediction of the younger generation, except in one case (child adoption, 83% against 82%; zoo trip, 69% against 66%; wedding invitation, 53% against 35%).

For both Tan Seng Seng and his mother, the Chinese male and female subjects have predicted their actions according to a similar pattern. Ethnic influence is assumed to exert greater influence among the female than the male group. This is because the female's greater role in the family domestic circle and in bringing up children is usually associated with the influence of traditional cultural values, contrary to the males who are usually the breadwinners, career-minded and involved extensively with others in workplace spheres. The findings, however, do not seem to support this assumption. In only 4 out of 7 cases, the female subjects have rated ethnic consideration higher than their counter part. In all the cases against material interests, they seem to be equally capable of recognising the importance of material interests. In one case, contrary to the prediction of the male subjects, they even seem to have rated the status interest higher as an overriding influence than ethnic consideration.

The Malay subjects seem to predict well the possible reactions of the Chinese actor in most of the situations observed. In most cases, they have predicted the Chinese ethnic representative actor's choice of action without much difference from the Chinese subjects themselves. They have demonstrated that for practical reasons, the materially-motivated actions can override the hypothetical ethnic preference in some social situations, and shown the emergence of ethnically- oriented actions that undermine status interest in other situations. In terms of accuracy of estimation, the Malays' judgements are rather more mixed in Tan Seng Seng's case than in his mother's (Table 4.17). They seem to have over-estimated ethnic influence for Tan Seng Seng in two cases and under-estimated in three cases. Two other cases have been estimated almost accurately. This can be compared to six over-estimations in his mother's case.

Table 4.17: Percentage Predicting Ethnic Preference as a Choice

	Tan Seng Seng		Mother	
	Chinese	Malay	Chinese	Malay
Shopping	14	28	32	68
Renting	4	1	21	21
Child minding	17	30	28	56
Housekey	1	2	5	7
Child Adoption	82	70	83	86
Zoo Trip	66	57	69	78
Wedding Invitation	35	36	53	76

The Malays seem to have misjudged the Chinese' lesser concern for ethnic preference in the cases of shopping choice and child-minding. It is probably not easy for the Malays to ignore the Chinese concern for ethnic consideration vis-a-vis economic interests. The Malays understand that the Chinese are not only economically a successful group, but they are also a strong ethnic group culturally and politically in Malaysia. The Malays seem to demonstrate this by giving either an overriding, or a substantial, priority for ethnic consideration in the cases which are important to the family and culture (child adoption, the zoo trip and the wedding invitation). But the importance of Chinese ethnicity in the family and cultural spheres is still much greater than the Malays have estimated. However, their rating in other cases is more inclined towards over-estimation of ethnic preference and more so in their estimation of Tan Seng Seng's mother's ethnic preference.

The Chinese are probably aware of the need for them to play down the importance of the ethnic differences in public interactions like the business and commercial spheres. Being a successful business group in the private economic sectors, the pressures to play down their ethnic sentiments is also much demanded, mainly among the present younger generation, in order to sustain their success in a multiethnic society. More importantly, the political pressures and demands, viz, economic policy, can also suppress any form of open discrimination on the basis of ethnic differences with

regards to the politically dominant Malay ethnic group members. On the other hand, the Malays, and also the others in Malaysia, are aware that one of the reasons for the Chinese success in business is because of the organisational support of their ethnic clan-based economic cooperation *(kongsi)*. Thus, it is possible for the Malays to overestimate the Chinese concern for ethnic consideration even in the economic sphere.

The nature of the social situations seem to determine to a large extent whether ethnic consideration would be perceived by the subjects as being challenged by other interests and, thus worthy of serious consideration. In other words, it is rather a question of the nature of the social contexts in which ethnicity may or may not take relevance. In the first set of hypothetical circumstances, the predictions made by the Chinese subjects seem to show that the Malaysian Chinese at the individual level are believed to be more influenced by self-interest of material kind than that of ethnic preference. Both males and females from the younger and older generations appear to emphasise that the pursuit of material benefits exert a greater influence than ethnic preference in those hypothetical questions where ethnic preference was tested against material self-interests. However, in social situations where ethnic preference was tested against status interests, the nature of these situations do not seem to permit the status interests to override the influence of ethnic preference.

The overwhelming emphasis on the possibility of material interests influencing a Chinese person's choice of action seems to indicate that ethnic preference may not even have been considered by the subjects as an important influence. Any person is unlikely to act very strongly or purely on ethnic basis except in a highly segregated society. But since this is not the situation in Malaysia, it is normal to expect a person to act in a very practical manner in some situations if people do not perceive their ethnic identity and interest will be at stake if they act in a more pragmatic way. Material consideration does play an important role in everyday life. Presumably no individual will want to miss out on any monetary gains from lower-priced shopping, renting-out house or child-minding, although this may look to an observer as acts of disregard for ethnic consideration. Thus we may wonder whether the subjects really could have perceived their ethnic identity and interest to be at stake when their ethnic interests are pitted against material interests. It is not after all impossible for the subjects to think that in the above situations (shopping, renting-out house, housekeys and child-minding), their ethnic interest is not seriously challenged sufficiently for them to consider it with equal weightage as they may in the case of child adoption, the zoo trip and the wedding invitation.

It is quite impossible for the subjects to think that the Chinese ethnicity will be at risk if they do not make an ethnic preference choice in the above situations. To predict

such acts would mean only that the Chinese are blindly influenced by their ethnic sentiments. In business transactions, as in the above situations, the bargaining is not truly, or greatly, between ethnicity and material self-interests. The situations tested practically seem to be strongly in favour of material consideration than ethnic preference. Thus, any over-estimation of ethnic consideration by the Malays under such circumstances does not allow us to make any conclusive assumption about the weakening of the Chinese ethnic alignment in Malaysia vis-a-vis economic individualism. The Chinese, on the other hand, seem to support the persistence of strong ethnic attachments in matters related to family and culture. But the Malays seem to under-estimate the significance of Chinese ethnicity in these spheres.

As far as the social situations being tested are concerned, the observations made in this study only concern the possible micro-level interactions between ethnic groups in Malaysian life. At this level, the findings show that social situations which are more personal, exclusive, or routine to family and ethnic group, or close to it, tend to encourage actions which are consistent with ethnic sentiments. This includes social situations that are either influenced by ethnic culture, style or taste, as in the examples of shopping and the wedding invitation, or by family norms or concerns as in child-minding, child adoption and the family trip to the zoo. On the contrary, the social situations that are impersonal and formal in nature, or close to it, tend to

bring about actions that are encouraged by self-interest of material or status. This includes social situations which, by and large, do not involve intimate or personal social contact, for instance in the case of renting out a house, handing neighbours the housekeys in emergency situations and also partly in the case of attending a wedding.

Economic individualism can invoke greater motivation of self-interest and encourage extensive commercial transactions between the Chinese and the Malays in Malaysia. But such interethnic business exchanges for the Chinese in Malaysia are not new. They have engaged in 'market place' interactions since colonial times. But they have treated their micro-level business interactions and exchanges with other ethnic groups as an individual matter separate from that concerning their culture, family and politics. The Malays are aware of this. They seem to have confirmed this by indicating the importance of the Chinese ethnic sentiments in the matters related to family and culture. But the present observations do not reveal anything about the societal level political matters that concern ethnic group relations in Malaysia. While the universalistic norms, viz., self-interests of material and status kind, may continue to influence the interethnic contact of the Malaysian Chinese (and the others), it may not necessarily reduce the significance of ethnic identity and sentiments in the society where there is a high degree of political mobilisation of ethnic allegiance.

Chapter 5

STRENGTH OF ETHNIC PREFERENCE VERSUS PERSONAL OBLIGATION

In the previous chapter, the strength of Chinese ethnic preference as perceived by the Chinese themselves, as well as by the Malays, was compared with the influence of self-interest. In this chapter, the importance of Chinese ethnic preference will be further measured and understood in hypothetical social situations where ethnic preference is seen to be in conflict with values of personal obligation. We will now be able to see how the Chinese, as well as the Malays, estimate the strength of Chinese ethnic alignment relative to that of their appraisal of personal obligation as an influence in their everyday life. By personal obligation here we refer to some sense of social obligation to an individual that has developed across ethnic lines.

In social situations where members of different ethnic groups come to interact, this act of personal obligation, however, cannot be assumed to be a simple matter since it can also come into conflict with ethnic preference as determinants of alignment. In normal circumstances, unless it is legally prohibited, an individual is indeed expected or encouraged, for example, to talk, shake hands, smile, obey or respect parents and other elder members of the family and community, or to allow children to play with their peers in the neighbourhood, to attend invitations from friends and neighbours, and to help each other when the need arises. Acts of personal obligation, however, can also come

into conflict with ethnic sentiment of the individual, where interethnic interactions occur. The choice to behave in a manner that fulfils personal obligation can be hindered by ethnic sentiments, or vice versa.

The Chinese and the Malay subjects were presented with questions, through another set of interethnic hypothetical situations, asking them to indicate in which manner the typical Malaysian Chinese, Tan Seng Seng, and his family members, would choose to act in these situations where both personal obligation and ethnic influences presumed to come into conflict. The following questions were formulated to represent such situations.

1) Tan Seng Seng's 12 year old son wants to bring his Malay friends home to play.

   i) What will Tan Seng Seng say?
   [1] Yes
   [2] No
   [3] Other

   ii) What will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish him to say?
   [1] Yes
   [2] No
   [3] Other

2) Tan Seng Seng has a next door Malay neighbour who likes her child to play with Tan Seng Seng's 2 year old daughter. Will he allow his Malay neighbour to take his daughter to her house for the afternoon?

   i) What will Tan Seng Seng say?
   [1] Yes
   [2] No
   [3] Other

   ii) What will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish him to say?
   [1] Yes
   [2] No
   [3] Other

3) Tan Seng Seng's office received 2 applications for the post of office-boy in his department. Tan Seng Seng is asked to choose any one of the applicants: Abdul Taha and Lim Wong Peng who are equally suitable candidates except that Abdul Taha is one of his neighbour's sons.

i) Whom will Tan Seng Seng choose?
[1] Abdul Taha
[2] Lim Wong Peng
[3] Other

ii) Whom will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish him to choose?
[1] Abdul Taha
[2] Lim Wong Peng
[3] Other

4) Tan Seng Seng has an Indian friend as a workmate. This friend is throwing a wedding party for his daughter at his house.

i) Will Tan Seng Seng go?
[1] Yes
[2] No
[3] Other

ii) Will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish him to go?
[1] Yes
[2] No
[3] Other

5) Mr. Rashid, a mechanical engineer who graduated from Oxford, has been the head of Tan Seng Seng's Mechanical Department for the past 3 years. A Chinese group within his department is trying to replace his boss with a Chinese candidate.

i) Will Tan Seng Seng support his boss?
[1] Yes
[2] No
[3] Other

ii) Will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish him to support his boss?
[1] Yes
[2] No
[3] Other

6) Tan Seng Seng's wife has been persuading her daughter to marry Jamil, her Malay friend's son who is considered by Tan Seng Seng's family as a good person, having close rapport with them, speaking fluent Chinese and familiar with the Chinese lifestyle.

i) Will Tan Seng Seng's daughter agree with her mother's proposal?
[1] Yes
[2] No
[3] Other

ii) Will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish her grand- daughter to agree to the proposal?
[1] Yes
[2] No
[3] Other

In everyday dealings, a person can be expected to face many different types of moral duty of personal obligation, such as to family members, neighbours, friends, employer or boss. The above questions reflect some of this kind of duty which seems to be entangled with particularistic norms of ethnic preferences.

Findings

Bringing a Friend Home

In the case of *bringing a friend home* (question 1), the strength of Tan Seng Seng's ethnic sentiments is presumed to be challenged by his duty of personal obligation as a responsible parent towards his son. In this situation, would Tan Seng Seng be committed towards his personal obligation and allow his son to bring home his Malay friend, or would he disagree with his son's wish because of his ethnic sentiments or prejudice against the Malays? Some parents may not want their children to mix or have close relations with other ethnic children because of their ethnic prejudice against them, or because of their own strong ethnic sentiment. In such situations, their duty of personal obligation to their children's needs and wishes can become a challenging influence or interest. But in a modern

multiethnic society, such blind acts of ethnic consciousness can be highly impractical.

There seems to be no doubt in the minds of the subjects about the over-riding importance of personal obligation in the case of *bringing a friend home*. A large proportion of the Chinese and Malay subjects do not seem to think that ethnic sentiments will have any significant influence on Tan Seng Seng refusing his son's wish to bring home his Malay friend to play with.

As shown in Table 5.1, 96% of Chinese subjects predicted that Tan Seng Seng will allow his son to bring his Malay friend home. This tends to imply that Tan Seng Seng's duty of personal obligation to his son and his son's friend becomes a far more important consideration than any other based on ethnic sentiment. Both Chinese male and female subjects predicted this choice of action in equal numbers (96%) (Table 5.2).

Table 5.1: Bringing a Friend Home, by Ethnic Group (%)

	Tan Seng Seng		Tan's Mother	
	Chinese	**Malays**	**Chinese**	**Malays**
Yes	96	93	80	57
No	1	4	14	35
Other	3	3	6	8
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 5.2: Bringing a Friend Home by, Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Tan Seng Seng				Tan's Mother			
	CM	CF	MM	MF	CM	CF	MM	MF
Yes	96	96	91	96	80	80	52	64
No	3	0	6	3	15	12	39	30
Other	1	4	3	1	5	8	9	6
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Predictions among the Malay subjects also seem to imply that the influence of personal obligation would overrule ethnic sentiment. 93% of them predicted the non-ethnic choice as a preferable option. No significant gender differences were observed among the Malays.

Parents, in bringing their children up and in fulfilling their needs, can be expected to understand the need for children among others to have friends to play with, as this is considered an important process in their early socialisation. Responsible parents do, however, try to monitor and control their children's freedom to mix with 'just anybody' to make sure that they do not pick up any bad influences or habits. But it is unlikely that the majority of parents would prevent their children from mixing or having close relationships with children of other ethnic groups because of their prejudice towards them, or because of their own strong ethnic sentiment. If a child brings, or wishes to bring home, a friend belonging to another ethnic group, it can be taken to mean that the child has formed a

close relationship with this friend. Thus, it is only practical to expect parents like Tan Seng Seng to show a more understanding and tolerant attitude in allowing their children to mix with other children, including children from other ethnic groups who most likely attend the same school or who live in the same neighbourhood. They may even recognise the importance of such interethnic friendship as they themselves have, or wish to have experienced during their own childhood.

Generally, the older generation will be more conservative in their thinking about accepting changes. Matters relating to children and their upbringing can create great concern. They can be more worried, suspicious and reluctant to accept with an open mind mixing with children from different ethnic backgrounds. They may worry that close friendship with members of an outside group may even lead the children to marry outside their group. However, in predicting Tan Seng Seng's mother's choice, pattern of response did not change much among the Chinese subjects. Value of personal obligation seems to prevail as the overriding influence among the Chinese of the older generation. 80% of them predicted that Tan Seng Seng's mother will also be influenced by the value of personal obligation (80%). But some differences in opinion do appear to imply that the Chinese of the older generation would be more reluctant to allow free interethnic mixing. In Tan Seng Seng's mother case, 14% appear to indicate ethnic consideration as an important influence in her decision not to allow her

grandson to bring home his Malay friend. This can be compared to 1% in Tan Seng Seng's own case.

A clear shift in opinion seems to be apparent among the Malay subjects in predicting Tan Seng Seng's mother's choice of action. While 57% of the Malays continue to predict in a way to imply personal obligation as an overriding influence, with a considerable shift, 35% of them now seem to be inclined to think that there is a possibility of ethnic consideration taking priority over personal obligation. The Malays' over-estimation of ethnic influence result from their relatively recent experience of 'modernisation' and from living in more mixed communities than the Chinese. The Malays may still be traditional in their attitudes to recognise the possibility of the older generation, like Tan Seng Seng's mother, being influenced strongly by the value of personal obligation.

Child's Playmate

In the case of *child's playmate* (question 2), Tan Seng Seng's duty of personal obligation is presumed to be challenged by his ethnic sentiment, that is, whether to allow his Malay neighbour to take home his child to play with their child. Theoretically, prejudice against other ethnic groups, or a person's own ethnic sentiments, can be expected to be challenged by personal obligation towards neighbours when one lives in a mixed ethnic neighbourhood. But from a practical point of view, as in the first

situation, in any case, refusing to talk, not acknowledging or not allowing interaction between children because of ethnic prejudice or sentiment, can be considered as an act of blind ethnic sentiments or prejudice that may not at all be suitable for modern living in heterogeneous communities. The result shows the presence of this pragmatic attitude among the subjects.

In the case of *child's playmate*, the Chinese subjects seem to have overwhelmingly predicted the action of personal obligation as a preference (Tables 5.3 & 5.4). This is indicated by 87% of the subjects. The subjects think that Tan Seng Seng will allow his Malay neighbour to take his two year old daughter to be a playmate for their child. The possibility of ethnic influence for Tan Seng Seng to refuse his Malay neighbour was indicated by 9% of the subjects. No great gender differences were observed.

Table 5.3: Child's Playmate by, Ethnic Group (%)

	Tan Seng Seng		Tan's Mother	
	Chinese	Malays	Chinese	Malays
Yes	87	84	56	48
No	9	11	32	44
Other	4	5	12	8
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 5.4: Child's Playmate by, Ethnic Group and Gender(%)

	Tan Seng Seng				Tan's Mother			
	CM	CF	MM	MF	CM	CF	MM	MF
Yes	84	91	83	84	61	52	49	47
No	11	6	11	12	28	35	42	45
Other	5	3	6	4	11	12	8	8
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

A majority of the Malay subjects are also of the opinion that Tan Seng Seng will allow his child to be taken by his Malay neighbour to their house (84%). Compared to the prediction by the Chinese, only a subtle drop in the support for action of personal obligation was indicated. Almost an equal number of Malay male and female subjects seem to support the relative importance of the value of personal obligation over that of ethnic consideration.

However, in predicting Tan Seng Seng's mother's preference, the Chinese did not seem to show the same strength of personal obligation as in the case of *bringing a friend home*. Instead, the Chinese, like the Malay subjects, do not seem to believe that the value of personal obligation will be an overwhelming influence. Ethnic consideration seems to exert greater influence on Tan Seng Seng's mother. As mentioned earlier, the older generation generally would be more traditional in their attitudes. In the present case, another factor could also have been perceived by the subjects as strengthening the traditional attitude among the

older generation. This is the age of the Tan Seng Seng's child who is only two years old; this may cause more worry among the older generation. Among the Chinese subjects, only 56% predicted the non-ethnic choice of action. 32% predicted refusal from Tan Seng Seng's mother, to imply the overriding influence of ethnic consideration. Among the Malay subjects, the support of the possible influence of personal obligation was even much lower, i.e. 48%, whereas 44% seem to have predicted ethnic influence. No gender differences were observed among both Chinese and Malay subjects.

Office-Boy Candidate

The role of personal obligation which is expected among neighbours may also extend beyond their close local surroundings. Neighbours are also expected to acknowledge each other, as a matter of personal obligation, when they meet at different places such as in a shopping and leisure centre, in the streets, parks, playgrounds, or even be ready to give a helping hand to neighbours or their children whenever and wherever the need arises.

In the case of *office boy candidate* (question 3), one can expect Tan Seng Seng to be influenced by his feelings of neighbourliness to pick Abdul Taha, who is the son of a Malay neighbour for the job of office boy. But, the fellow Chinese candidate, Lim Wong Peng, can also be expected to arouse ethnic sentiments which can exert a constraint on Tan Seng Seng from freely expressing a choice of action based on

personal obligation. Because of his ethnic consideration, Tan Seng Seng might also want to consider Lim Wong Peng and not Abdul Taha for the post, although both candidates are equally qualified for the job.

The result appears to show that commitment to the duty of personal obligation continues to be perceived by the majority of the subjects as an over-riding influence in the case of *office boy candidate* (Tables 5.5 & 5.6). Both the Chinese and Malay subjects are of the opinion that Tan Seng Seng will pick Taha, the Malay candidate, to work in his department and not his fellow Chinese candidate (76% and 75% respectively). 15% of the Chinese and 17% of the Malay subjects predicted that Tan Seng Seng would pick Lim Wong Peng, who is presumed to represent the choice of ethnic alignment. No great gender differences were observed among the subjects across ethnic groups.

In predicting the choice of Tan Seng Seng's mother, the preference for personal obligation vis-a-vis the Malay candidate has been reduced. The prediction among the Chinese subjects on the possible influence of personal obligation dropped from 76%, in Tan Seng Seng's choice, to 50% in his mother's. The prediction for a co-ethnic candidate increased from 15% to 33%. Both male and female subjects have expressed this pattern of certainty without noticeable difference.

Table 5.5: Office-Boy Candidate by, Ethnic Group (%)

	Tan Seng Seng		Tan's Mother	
	Chinese	Malays	Chinese	Malays
Abdul Taha	76	75	50	29
Lim Wong Peng	15	17	33	61
Other	9	8	17	10
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 5.6: Office-Boy Candidate by, Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Tan Seng Seng				Tan's Mother			
	CM	CF	MM	MF	CM	CF	MM	MF
Abdul Taha	77	74	80	70	48	52	25	34
Lim Wong Peng	13	17	13	21	32	34	65	57
Other	10	9	7	9	20	14	10	9
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The reverse prediction is clearly indicated by the Malay subjects in the case of Tan Seng Seng's mother. They appear to show a greater conviction on the influence of ethnic sentiments (61%), compared to the choice of personal obligation (29%). A slightly higher percentage of Malay males (65%) than the females (57%) have expressed their certainty on the possible influence of ethnic preference. Perhaps more women are at home and need to 'get on' with neighbours.

The subjects appear to recognise the importance of personal obligation between friends and neighbours to overrule the act of favouritism based on ethnic differences. Showing good

will as a duty of personal obligation to neighbours, or their family members outside the neighbourhood, can create a strong influence that may undermine acts of ethnic alignment. Refusing to help or showing favouritism to a friend's and neighbour's son, as in the present case, could lead to a strained relationship between friends and neighbours. This can also happen between co-ethnic neighbours and friends. But in the present case, Tan Seng Seng may even be accused of being racist if the Malay neighbour friend comes to know that Tan Seng Seng has picked a fellow Chinese candidate instead of his son. One would expect Tan Seng Seng to be more careful and not take such a possible social risk, thus straining the relationship by ignoring his neighbour's expectation. Under such conditions, Tan Tan Seng would suppress his ethnic feeling, although his action does not necessarily mean he ignores the importance of his ethnic identity. But under different circumstances, without such constraints, Tan Seng Seng may act differently or even show favouritism to his co-ethnic candidate.

Wedding Party

Personal obligation can also come into conflict with one's ethnic sentiment at other public places, like the workplace, where different ethnic members interact and work together. Formal and informal relations that are formed across ethnic boundaries between workers of the same rank, or between people of different ranks, in the same department can also demand that a person show some degree of personal obligation

as a norm in his or her interaction. This duty of personal obligation becomes more influential when people work together for a longer period of time.

Friendship between members of different ethnic groups can also develop in the course of their daily interactions in the workplace. In many modern organisations, the management provides opportunities for recreational activities for the workers. They may also meet during breaks for refreshment. This can enhance the importance of the duty of personal obligation between them, not only in the workplace but also in other personal matters. A workmate, for example, may invite his or her co-workers to his or her son's or daughter's wedding party. Those invited also have a personal obligation to attend. This duty of personal obligation can also be challenged by a person's ethnic sentiments when he or she takes into account this factor when inviting, or deciding to attend such an gathering. In the case of the *wedding party* (question 4), the relative strength of personal obligation and ethnic sentiments are presumed to be the prospective conflicting interests. Tan Seng Seng would be expected to attend his Indian workmate's daughter's wedding party, if he is more concerned about his duty of personal obligation towards his co-worker friend than the possible influence of ethnic sentiments.

Yet, compared to the case of the office-boy candidate, one would not expect Tan Seng Seng, or even his mother, to be more serious about their ethnic sentiments in the present

case. At least in the case of the office-boy candidate, Tan Seng Seng is not only dealing with his formal duty to lessen his consideration for personal obligation, but he also seems to be facing a more 'tempting' ethnic choice. In the present case of the wedding invitation, Tan Seng Seng does not seem to face any such tempting ethnic choice. Thus, it will be unrealistic for the subjects to imagine Tan Seng Seng ignoring his friend's invitation simply because his friend is of a different ethnic origin. The results appear to indicate this.

As the results in Tables 5.7 & 5.8 show, almost all the subjects seem to think that the choice of personal obligation would take precedence over ethnic sentiments. Among the Chinese, 98% predicted that Tan Seng Seng would attend the wedding party of his Indian workmate's daughter. 97% of the Malay subjects, likewise, predicted this very strongly. Both male and female subjects across the ethnic groups have expressed their strong belief in the influence of personal obligation (96% Chinese males, 100% Chinese females, 98% Malay males and 96% Malay females).

Table 5.7: Wedding Party by, Ethnic Group (%)

	Tan Seng Seng		Tan's Mother	
	Chinese	Malays	Chinese	Malays
Yes	98	97	83	62
No	0	1	6	23
Other	2	2	11	15
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 5.8 Wedding Party by, Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Tan Seng Seng				Tan's Mother			
	CM	CF	MM	MF	CM	CF	MM	MF
Yes	96	100	98	96	80	86	58	66
No	0	0	0	3	5	8	23	22
Other	4	0	2	1	15	6	19	12
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Regarding Tan Seng Seng's mother's preferred choice of action, both the Chinese and Malay subjects continued to indicate the priority of personal obligation over that of ethnic sentiments. Only a small shift in opinion was observed, although 83% of them still seem to believe in the importance of personal obligation. A shift in opinion is much greater among the Malay subjects. 62% seem to stress the influence of personal obligation and 23% seem to stress ethnic sentiments. Comparison between the genders showed very little difference.

Supporting Boss

Compared to all the above cases, the case of *supporting boss* (question 5), challenges Tan Seng Seng's personal obligation which appears to be more crucial. Tan Seng Seng's ethnic sentiments could be an important influence because he realises that his fellow Chinese workmates in the department are trying to oust his boss who is a Malay. The problem seems really to arouse ethnic sentiments. Although his personal obligation demands that he supports his Malay boss

for whom he has been working for 3 years, Tan Seng Seng's ethnic sentiments can become another entangling influence for him to support his co-Chinese workers' efforts to bring in a Chinese boss as their new departmental leader.

In the case of *supporting boss*, both the Chinese and Malay subjects, however, do not seem to speculate that Tan Seng Seng's ethnic sentiments would restrain him from supporting his Malay boss (Tables 5.9 & 5.10). Turning his back and supporting the attempts of his fellow Chinese workmates to replace his Malay boss with a Chinese does not seem to convince the subjects' rationalisation. However, the influence of personal obligation was not convincingly expressed by the subjects as in the other cases, especially among the Chinese. The possibility of the influence of personal obligation taking priority was predicted only by 42% of the Chinese and 52% by the Malay subjects. The figures are very much lower than the predictions in the previous cases. Although the figure does not allow us to conclude otherwise in favour of influence of ethnic sentiments, a substantial 25% of the Chinese and 32% of the Malay subjects speculated that he would be ethnically motivated and therefore not support his Malay boss. No gender differences were observed.

Table 5.9: Supporting Boss by, Ethnic Group (%)

	Tan Seng Seng		Tan's Mother	
	Chinese	Malays	Chinese	Malays
Yes	42	52	31	36
No	25	32	24	46
Other	33	16	45	18
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 5.10: Supporting Boss by, Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Tan Seng Seng				Tan's Mother			
	CM	CF	MM	MF	CM	CF	MM	MF
Yes	46	38	54	49	35	26	32	42
No	24	27	33	31	23	26	55	35
Other	30	35	13	20	42	48	13	23
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

When it came to consider how Tan Seng Seng's mother would want him to act, the Chinese subjects' prediction further showed a lack of certainty on the influence of personal obligation over that of ethnic sentiments. The Chinese subjects seem to predict this only by 31%. The prediction for the predominance of ethnic sentiments was still about the same as in the case of Tan Seng Seng (24%). A shift in opinion, particularly among the Malay males, in favour of the influence of ethnic sentiments was observed. The overall prediction for the overriding influence of ethnic sentiments rose to 46% among the Malays. Those who seem to predict that Tan Seng Seng will follow the personal obligation influence was 36%.

As the nature of the social situation resembles that of the power struggle between the Malays and the Chinese, the respondents seem to have a stronger opinion about the influence of ethnic interest compared to other cases. It is important to take note that 33% of the Chinese subjects in the case of Tan Seng Seng and 45% in the case of his mother were not able to indicate how Tan Seng Seng would choose to act. Comparing their responses with the other cases above, this significant 'non-committal' percentage does seem to imply that the importance of ethnic sentiments could not be easily disregarded in situations similar to that of political conflict in competition for power and leadership.

The Malays seem to be more 'open' than the Chinese in revealing their stronger opinion about the possible influence of ethnic interest among the Chinese, especially among the older generation. This was more prominent among 55% of the Malay male subjects who predicted the influence of ethnic sentiment on Tan Seng Seng's mother. This could be due to the greater involvement of males than females in politics to make them realise the importance of ethnicity in Malaysian politics. They may have higher ethnic consciousness as far as political issues are concerned, although the Chinese seem to 'suppress' it, which could be owing to their minority status. This reminds us that we cannot finally know the motives and intentions behind the choice they make.

Mixed Marriage

Personal obligation of children towards parents can also come into conflict with the influence of ethnic sentiment. In a society like Malaysia where cultural tradition is still very much an important influence in the lives of ethnic groups, the aspirations of parents play a very important role in influencing the choice of the children. In the matter of children's marriages for instance, traditionally' if not always, the approval of the elders in the family, especially the parents, is a prerequisite. However, in the processes of modernisation, economic development and social mobility, liberal and individual freedom have encouraged courtship and love marriage among individuals. But in many societies, and Malaysia being one of them, mixed marriages between individuals of different ethnic backgrounds remain very low.

Among the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities in Malaysia, traditional arranged marriages and the wishes of parents in the selection of a spouse may be beginning to give way to that of modern marriages for love or of personal choice. Yet children are still expected to respect and consider their parents' choice or wishes as a matter of their personal obligation towards them. In the hypothetical case of *mixed marriage* (question 6), the question appears to measure the relative strength of Tan Seng Seng's daughter's personal obligation in satisfying her mother's wish to that of her ethnic sentiments in the matter of her selection of a

marriage partner. The difficulty here is that it is the mother who is suggesting the inter-ethnic marriage. In actual sense we are not measuring the relative strength of personal obligation towards an individual of different ethnic background. The question only tries to measure it indirectly by anticipating that the daughter would identify with her mother's wish. It is unlikely, however, for parents in normal circumstances to suggest mixed marriage to their children. But there may be some other reason for them to do so. For example, Chinese and Indians may agree to marry a Malay so as to enjoy the economic benefits, directly or indirectly, of the government's policy. Parents who are motivated by individualistic attitudes may allow or even suggest mixed marriage in particular circumstances to consolidate their kinship ties with their economic and status self-interests.

The results show that the subjects' presumption of the plausible influence of personal obligation over ethnic sentiments has reduced tremendously in the case of *mixed marriage* (Tables 5.11 & 5.12). Respecting and fulfilling the wishes of parents, like the mother's wish in this case, could be expected to arouse a substantial, if not strong, influence of personal obligation in children. However, the Chinese subjects seem to show more conviction in the possibility of a refusal from Tan Seng Seng's daughter to marry a Malay despite her mother's persuasion. Only 4% of the Chinese appear to have expressed the opinion that the daughter will act on the basis of personal obligation to agree to her mother's proposal. A strong plausible influence

of ethnic sentiments was expected by 69%. They predicted that Tan Seng Seng's daughter will refuse her mother's proposal. Since the subjects actually have to take into consideration the personal obligation of the daughter towards her mother, a substantial percentage (27%) were not able to resolve the presumed value conflict in the question, which in other circumstances could possibly have increased the percentage of subjects rejecting mixed marriage. More Chinese female subjects (75%) than male subjects (63%) have expressed their certitude in the influence of ethnic sentiments. No gender differences were observed.

Table 5.11: Mixed Marriage by Ethnic Group (%)

	Tan Seng Seng		Tan's Mother	
	Chinese	Malays	Chinese	Malays
Yes	4	8	4	4
No	69	80	71	84
Other	27	12	25	12
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 5.12: Mixed Marriage by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Tan Seng Seng				Tan's Mother			
	CM	CF	MM	MF	CM	CF	MM	MF
Yes	4	4	9	6	3	5	3	4
No	63	75	79	82	68	74	85	83
Other	33	21	12	12	29	21	12	13
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The Malay subjects have over-estimated Chinese ethnic sentiments. 80% of them disclose the possibility of the importance of ethnic consideration over-powering the duty of personal obligation. Only a minority predicted the influence of personal obligation (8%), a little higher than that of the Chinese (4%). No significant gender differences were observed among the Malays.

No significant differences were observed in the prediction of Tan Seng Seng's mother's choice. Both the Chinese and Malay subjects seem to believe strongly in the plausibility of ethnic sentiments overpowering personal obligation. The Chinese predicted ethnic sentiments by 71%. The Malays again over-estimated the older generation's ethnic sentiments. 84% of them predicted ethnic sentiments as an overriding influence.

Unlike other cases, decisions made in the case of *mixed marriage* did not seem to be swayed by personal obligation despite the mother's wish. Both male and female subjects across the ethnic groups seem to believe that the social circumstance in the case of *mixed marriage* instigates a strong ethnic sentiment which becomes an overriding influence among both the younger and older generation Chinese. By indicating this, the subjects seem to confirm the strong tendency of endogamy within ethnic groups in Malaysia. The subjects may realise the importance of such in-group marriages in maintaining ethnic identity and

solidarity within the society where ethnicity is politically salient.

One of the important reasons why mixed marriages are believed to be unpopular in Malaysia is the wide religious differences especially between the Malays and non-Malays. In the present hypothetical case, Tan Seng Seng and his family represent a 'mainstream' Chinese Malaysian who belongs to the 'Chinese religion' (see chapter 1). Commitments to religious obligation could enhance ethnic sentiments.

Influence of Religious Obligation

As mentioned earlier, on the question of mixed marriage, any significant understanding of the influence of ethnic sentiments should also take into consideration the plausible influence of religion. Here arises the question of whether the strong predictions of rejection by Tan Seng Seng's daughter from marrying a Malay who is also a Muslim could be possibly influenced by her obligation towards her religion. In the present survey, two other questions are also included for this purpose. The results of these two questions will be an aid in understanding the extent to which the strength of religious obligation could be an important influence among the Chinese in their interactions with other ethnic members. This is particularly so when it comes to form close inter-personal or inter-family relationships, such as through interethnic marriages. The two additional questions are as follows:

7) Tan Seng Seng will be attending the election of committee members for the local branch of his political party next week. The treasurer's post is a keenly contested three-cornered fight. The previous treasurer was found to have embezzled the party's funds.

i) Whom will Tan Seng Seng vote?
[1] Chuah, a businessman linked with the Malay elites
[2] Yap, a school teacher with grass-root support from the local Chinese
[3] Lee, a candidate backed by the Chinese religious group
[4] Other

ii) Whom will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish him to vote for?
[1] Chuah, a businessman linked with the Malay elites
[2] Yap, a school teacher with grass-root support from the local Chinese
[3] Lee, a candidate backed by the Chinese religious group
[4] Other

8) Tan Seng Seng's daughter, attending one of the local universities, wonders whom she should vote as president of the university's Student Union:

a) Ah Huat who takes religion as a personal choice
b) Ah Chong who prefers religion to be seen as a separate issue from politics
c) Ah Hock, besides belonging to the same religion as Tan Seng Seng, is also a committee member of the Chinese Students' Religious Society.

i) Whom will Tan Seng Seng's daughter vote for?
[1] Ah Huat
[2] Ah Chong
[3] Ah Hock
[4] Other

ii) Whom will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish her grand daughter to vote for?
[1] Ah Huat
[2] Ah Chong
[3] Ah Hock
[4] Other

The two questions above could indicate the strength of religious commitment of the Chinese individuals. By putting forward different ethnic choices that represent the importance and or otherwise of religious commitment to the subjects, one can differentiate to a certain extent between the influence of religious commitment and that of ethnic sentiment alone. If a Chinese person's religious obligation

was thought to be an overwhelming influence, then the subjects could be expected to predict Tan Seng Seng or his daughter to support, as in the above cases, their ethnic candidate who represents, or is committed to, religious obligation in preference to their other ethnic candidates who do not.

In the case of the *treasurer's post* (question 7), Tan Seng Seng has to make a decision whether to support the candidacy of Lee, who has the backing of the Chinese religious group, or the other two candidates, Ah Chuan and Yap, who have the support of the Chinese grass-root and Malay elites, respectively. If Tan Seng Seng is expected to stand firmly behind Lee, this can be taken to mean that Tan Seng Seng has religious obligation as a priority in his mind, since in all the choices ethnic background is identical.

As shown in Tables 5.13 & 5.14, both the Chinese and Malay subjects seem to have clearly indicated that religious obligation is not an important influence among the Chinese in Malaysia. They have indicated this by showing their lowest priority for Lee who is supposed to represent the importance of religion to the Chinese. Only 4% of the Chinese and 8% of the Malays have indicated that Tan Seng Seng will support Lee. The majority of the Chinese (85%) and Malay (87%) subjects have rather strongly predicted other candidates (Yap and Chuah) who are pictured as non-religious candidates. Both the male and female subjects across the ethnic groups responded to this without much variation.

Table 5.13: Treasurer's Post by, Ethnic Group (%)

	Tan Seng Seng		Tan's Mother	
	Chinese	Malays	Chinese	Malays
Chuah	34	35	11	9
Yap	51	52	44	35
Lee	4	8	25	48
Other	11	5	20	8
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 5.14: Treasurer's Post by, Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Tan Seng Seng				Tan's Mother			
	CM	CF	MM	MF	CM	CF	MM	MF
Chuah	32	36	35	34	14	8	7	10
Yap	54	47	55	49	42	45	33	38
Lee	5	3	6	10	24	26	52	43
Other	9	14	4	7	20	21	8	9
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

In the case of Tan Seng Seng's mother, although the support for religious obligation seem to have increased substantially to 25% among the Chinese, 55% still do not anticipate this to be the case. Among the Malays, however, a slightly higher percentage seems to anticipate the important religious influence on the choice of Tan Seng Seng's mother (48% compared to 44%). No gender difference was observed among the Chinese and Malays in their prediction about Tan Seng Seng's mother's choice.

The above result is again very consistent with what the subjects thought Tan Seng Seng's daughter's possible

reaction would be in the case of electing the *student union president* (question 8) (Tables 5.15 & 5.16). Tan Seng Seng's daughter was predicted by 60% of the Chinese to support the candidates who are not religiously committed (Ah Huat and Ah Chong). Only 35% predicted Ah Hock, who stood for religious commitment as her choice. A much higher percentage (52%) of the Malay subjects, however, have predicted the possibility of the choice of Tan Seng Seng's daughter being influenced by religious obligation.

Table 5.15: Student Union President by, Ethnic Group (%)

	Tan Seng Seng		Tan's Mother	
	Chinese	Malays	Chinese	Malays
Ah Huat	12	12	6	13
Ah Chong	48	32	19	9
Ah Hock	35	52	61	72
Other	5	4	14	6
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Table 5.16: Student Union President by, Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Tan Seng Seng				Tan's Mother			
	CM	CF	MM	MF	CM	CF	MM	MF
Ah Huat	15	9	12	13	6	5	15	9
Ah Chong	39	56	27	38	16	21	10	9
Ah Hock	38	32	58	45	59	64	66	79
Other	8	3	3	4	18	10	9	3
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

A clear shift in opinion was observed when the subjects predicted the choice of Tan Seng Seng's mother. The majority of the Chinese subjects (61%) and the Malays (72%) now seem to believe that religious obligation will be a greater influence. Only 25% of the Chinese and 22% of the Malay subjects thought that Tan Seng Seng's mother would wish her grand-daughter to vote for candidates who are not committed to their religion.

In Malaysia, a person's religion can often coincide with an ethnic label or differences. In such a situation, religion can also be a matter of concern. It is probably religious obligation, and not entirely ethnic consciousness or ethnic differences, that might influence an individual like Tan Seng Seng's daughter in deciding whether to marry someone from a different ethnic and religious background. However, it is difficult to separate these two influences. For most Malaysians, irrespective of their ethnic background, because of their overlapping ethnic and religious boundaries, any indication of strength in one of these factors does not invalidate the other. The subjects seem to be less concerned about the importance of the 'Chinese religion' in the two above cases. Yet the influence of ethnic differences and religious obligation among the members of ethnic groups in Malaysia can be seen to go hand in hand, reinforcing rather than contradicting each other. This is especially so in interethnic interactions which involve the Malay ethnic group, because the prevalent social division on the basis of Malay/non-Malay also coincides and influences, by and large,

the corresponding Muslim-non-Muslim division of the population. Furthermore, in the cases of *treasurer's post* and *student union president*, the tests are concerned only with the strength of religious obligation within the Chinese group. But in the case of *mixed marriage* the test involved relationship with other ethnic groups. The Chinese may not be very religious, but this is quite a different issue from accepting someone from a different religious group as a marriage partner.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results seem to show that personal obligation has been viewed by a vast majority of the Chinese subjects as the most important influential factor that will undermine the influence of ethnic preference in 4 out of 6 cases (96% in the case of *bringing a friend home*, 87% in the case of *child's playmate*, 76% in the case of *office boy candidate*, and 98% in the case of *wedding party*). Consistently, this view is also reflected in the likely action of the older generation, although the percentages in support of personal obligation were reduced (80% in the case of *bringing a friend home*, 56% in the case of *child's playmate*, 50% in the case of *office-boy candidate* and 83% in the case of *wedding party*). But in two other cases (supporting boss and mixed marriage) the subjects did not seem to think that personal obligation will overwhelmingly overpower ethnic sentiments especially in the case of mixed marriage where the subjects clearly seem to indicate that ethnic sentiments would take

preference over personal obligation (69% in Tan Seng Seng's case and 71% in his mother's). Both the male and female Chinese subjects, without any significant disparity between them, have also expressed the above patterns in their predictions.

The Malay subjects seem to predict a similar possible influence in all the cases with regards to Tan Seng Seng and, in 4 out of 6 cases, with regards to his mother. But they seem to have over-estimated the Chinese ethnic sentiment in all the cases across generations. This seems to correspond with the general tendency of the dominant groups in any society who are likely to see the minority groups as 'sticking together'. The Chinese, on the other hand, may be more reluctant to indicate a lesser concern for their duty of personal obligation because this may be viewed as down grading their own culture and moral standing, thus effecting their dignity. It is not surprising if the Chinese subjects try to avoid creating too much of a 'bad' image of themselves in revealing an opinion which emphasises ethnic sentiments.

In all societies, members of ethnic groups are prepared for various culturally-defined roles through the process of socialisation. Norms that are socially and morally valued are installed in individuals based on the general cultural, or religious principles of a particular group. The act of personal obligation is one such norm. This norm becomes part and parcel of an individual's moral duty in everyday life.

Its importance as a moral duty would be usually considered by members of ethnic groups to accomplish the aspirations of cultural and moral values for which his or her group members stand. In many instances, if not all, this act of personal obligation is a universal norm because the act is based on universal values, such as being truthful, loving and caring, and rendering help to others in need.

People of different ethnic groups may ignore each other for some reasons when it comes to living in the same neighbourhood or working together. This may include reasons based on ethnic prejudices, differences and ethnocentric preferences. But under normal circumstances, people may suppress their ethnic sentiments and carry on with daily interaction with members of other ethnic groups for practical reasons. Individuals from different ethnic groups who come in increasing numbers to live in the same neighbourhood and work in the same places are likely to find it necessary to extend their duty of personal obligation beyond ethnic boundaries. Under highly violent situations between ethnic groups, personal obligation may be hindered from overruling an individual's ethnic sentiments at micro-level interaction. The situation in Malaysia at present is relatively peaceful without physical ethnic clashes.

The subjects' overwhelming support for the possible influence of personal obligation in most of the cases presented to them seems to indicate that ethnic consideration does not appear to possess a strong appeal

among the Chinese in their daily social course of interaction of this type. Acts of personal obligation across ethnic boundary, such as allowing children to make friends with other children, helping neighbours, attending the wedding of a co-worker's daughter or even showing support for boss in a multiethnic society like Malaysia is just a practical thing to anticipate. Cooperation and helping one another, for example in the same neighbourhood and workplace, practically becomes unavoidable in order to maintain a peaceful and social atmosphere among different ethnic neighbours and workers. But their action which may appear to support the influence of personal obligation across ethnic groups does not necessarily mean that they have ignored their ethnic identity. In Malaysia, a neighbourhood cooperation scheme called the *Rukun Tetangga* has been implemented for this very purpose. The scheme is aimed at creating more awareness among the people about the importance of cooperation, help and trust among neighbours regardless of ethnic backgrounds. Ignoring one another on the basis of ethnic difference could be an impractical attitude. But what we need to ask here is under what circumstances ethnicity may take relevance in their everyday lives?

The influence of personal obligation is strongly predicted in the case of *wedding party* (98%), *bringing a friend home* (96%) and *child's playmate* (87%). But in the case of *office boy*, it was reduced to 76% and further reduced to 42% in the case of *supporting boss* and to 4% in the case of *mixed*

marriages. Looking from the perspective of the influence of ethnic consideration, the subjects appear to believe that it exerts more influence in the case of *office-boy*, *supporting boss* and *mixed marriages* than the other three cases (Table 5.17). A different pattern of prediction starts to emerge in these three cases. A clear cut exception is, however, in the case of *mixed marriage*. In this case, both males and females across ethnic groups have expressed their disposition of the possibility of ethnic sentiment as an overpowering influence. For the older generation, almost the same pattern of ratings was observed but with much greater confidence in the influence of ethnic sentiments. The emergence of ethnic influence significantly corresponds with the different nature of interethnic situations studied. This could explain the variation in the influence of personal obligation over ethnic preference or vice-versa, even if we accept the questions as the 'true test'.

Table 5.17: Percentage Predicting Ethnic Preference as a Choice

	Tan Seng Seng		Mother	
	Chinese	Malay	Chinese	Malay
Wedding Party	0	1	6	23
Bringing Friend Home	1	4	14	35
Child's Playmate	9	11	32	44
Office-Boy Candidate	15	17	33	61
Supporting Boss	25	32	24	46
Mixed Marriage	69	80	71	84

The first three compared to the other three following cases, are very much a simple social matter by nature. The subjects could not anticipate any strong challenge on the basis of ethnic consideration to stop anyone from fulfilling simple everyday duties of personal obligation. For this reason, the Chinese would not really mind attending the wedding of an Indian workmate's daughter, allowing their children to bring home a Malay friend, or even allowing their next-door Malay neighbour to take home their children.

But in the case of *office-boy* candidate, a sense of personal obligation towards a neighbour appears to be better challenged by ethnic consideration to help one's own ethnic member to secure the job. This challenge does reflect the possible influence of the wider practice of ethnic preferential economic policy (New Economic Policy) by the Government to help positively the Malays. The policy has been an influential factor since 1969, dominating the issues of jobs and equity distributions between ethnic groups in Malaysian society. The Chinese may not be reluctant to counter balance the government's effort to help the Malays in economy by showing more favouritism to co-ethnic members as long they feel socially and politically safe to do so. A greater degree of ethnic consciousness as such can be expected in the case of office-boy candidate.

Moreover, ethnic sentiments play an important role in matters that are political in nature, such as in the case of *supporting boss*. Again, the wider practice of ethnic

politics that has been determining the political trends and voting patterns in Malaysian society, cannot be assumed to pass by without influencing the mind of a Chinese person, like Tan Seng Seng, to ally with his fellow Chinese workmates to bring in a Chinese as their leader or boss in the department. On the other hand, because of a good personal working rapport that might have been formed between Tan Seng Seng and his Malay boss, a strong influence of personal obligation can also be expected in this case. Thus these two factors in this circumstance, compared to other cases, seem to create a serious conflict of interest for Tan Seng Seng. As reflected through the prediction, a considerable proportion of subjects (33% in the case of Tan Seng Seng, and 45% of his mother) could not easily determine, as in the other cases, the overriding influence of personal obligation over ethnic preference.

Mixed marriages could come about much more easily in societies where free and wide interethnic interactions are viable. Proximity, however, is not the only factor that influences its occurrence. Mixed marriage is not a common phenomenon, particularly in societies where ethnic influence is still very important in the lives of ethnic groups. Any process, or formation of inter-personal relationship like mixed marriage, which can blur ethnic root and identity, will not be accepted that easily. On this very basis, the rate of mixed marriages have been used as an indicator in sociological studies to measure the assimilation process, including social distance, ethnic prejudice and stereotype.

If this sociological assumption is justifiable, than the predictions of the Chinese in the case of mixed marriage clearly indicates that Chinese ethnicity is very much an influential factor that can prevent any social process from endangering their ethnic identity.

The results which seem to show the lack of a strong religious commitment among the Chinese do not in any way prove that the Chinese have no problems in accepting the Muslim religion, which is an integral element of Malay identity, through mixed marriages. This religious influence should be differentiated between a person's own religious commitment and the rejection of other religions. For the majority of Chinese (as well as Indians) who in Malaysia are non-Muslims, the refusal to marry a Malay is also very much a reflection of their rejection of being compelled to convert and accept a new Muslim identity, which is almost unavoidable in such circumstances. Thus this rejection, which is not necessarily due to being very religious, is still a part of their religious commitment. The Chinese may refuse to show a strong commitment towards their own religion as an influence in everyday life. This does not imply that they will easily accept a person of another religion as a life partner, particularly when marrying a Malay means they have to convert and become a Muslim. As a consequence, one cannot conclude that religious consideration, or identity (to be non-Muslim) is not an important factor among the Chinese when compelled to accept a new religious identity through mixed marriages.

The predominance of personal obligation over the influence of ethnic sentiments can be possibly anticipated in most of the interactions involving social matters that are informal in nature. Nevertheless, as the subjects have indicated, ethnic sentiment can provoke a strong influence among Chinese individuals in some other situations. Firstly, in the situation where their acts will seriously endanger their ethnic identity. Secondly, ethnic sentiments appear to gain greater strength in social situations that are most likely to be influenced by the wider practice of ethnic politics and preferential policies at macro level in Malaysian society.

Chapter 6

SOCIAL CHANGES: CULTURAL, INTERETHNIC CONTACT, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES

In the two previous chapters, the strength of ethnic alignment among the Malaysian Chinese was assessed in the context of hypothetical social situations. The subjects were asked to express how they believe a fictional typical Malaysian Chinese would act in numerous social situations where ethnic consideration is likely to contradict material and status self-interests and values of personal obligation.

This chapter, and the succeeding one, looks at another way of supplementing our understanding of the significance of ethnicity in Malaysia. This is done by examining the data concerning subjects' own interethnic 'experiences' and 'attitudes'. We will examine the subjects 'experiences' related to their cultural adaptation, social contacts, and their 'attitudes' concerning social and political issues and problems. This will allow us to see whether the Chinese and Malay subjects have grown closer in these aspects of social changes in society. These 'experiences' and 'attitudes' measure the extent of similarities and agreement, or differences and disagreement between the Chinese and Malays. These measures are important in permitting us to see whether or not there is any basis for believing that social changes and modernisation in Malaysia have counter-balanced the importance people attached to ethnic sentiments and ethnic identity.

The following areas of 'experiences' and 'attitudes' of the subjects will be explored for the above purposes.

(i) Interethnic contact and cultural exposures

Since colonial times, ethnic relations among the major ethnic groups in Peninsular Malaysia have been marked to a large extent by their separation in economic activities and residential areas. As a consequence, this separation has restricted their interethnic contacts and intercultural exposures. Firstly, we will explore the subjects' interethnic contact exposure in their residential areas. By comparing the changes in interethnic contact exposure as shown in residential areas between the Malays and the Chinese subjects' during their childhood, and currently, we should be able to see to what extent these ethnic groups have come to live in close proximity after Independence.

Secondly, we shall focus on the intercultural adaptation among the subjects. The learning of the different aspects of another culture which is considered appropriate by members of another ethnic group may occur quite extensively among members of smaller and politically weaker groups. In other circumstances, assimilation or partial cultural adaptation may be required by the socio-cultural policy designed by the state. In this respect, the Malay language has been in use as the official and national language in Malaysia. The language can be expected to stand at the forefront of social interactions among the members of the different ethnic

groups. English is another common language which can be expected to play an important role in interethnic interactions. The extent of the usage of these languages, and the influence of other ethnic languages among the ethnic groups, can be understood only in the context of wider intercultural exposure. For this purpose, the usage of different languages, language-based newspapers and television programmes have been explored.

(ii) Interethnic contact

Development of mixed ethnic surroundings in residential areas and workplaces can be essential conditions needed to bring people of different ethnic backgrounds closer and enhance the development of common social and political attitudes. Historically, interaction among the Malays, Chinese and Indians in Malaysia has been restricted by the vast differences in their occupations, areas of residence and organisational activities. For the later generations, however, the restrictions on interethnic contacts could have been diluted by the interrelated processes of urbanisation, industrialisation and modernisation in the society. The effect of these processes will be explored more specifically in the next chapter. The questions on the actual interethnic contacts or interactions were designed to understand: (a) frequency of contact (b) ethnic members the subjects come into contact with the most, and (c) the various social settings, or avenues that play an important role in

providing the networks for these shared interactions and contacts to take place among the subjects.

(iii) Attitudes and Perceptions

The tangible divisions among ethnic groups discloses only part of ethnic relations. From the discussion in chapter 1, we know that in terms of ethnic labour force distribution, the Malays form the majority of agricultural workers, while the Chinese are dominant in the modern economic sectors. We are also aware that the Malays are the least urbanised group compared to the Chinese and Indians. But the Malays made rapid progress following the implementation of the New Economic Policy (see Chapter 1:39-41). This was acknowledged in the *Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991-1995)*: 'The improvement in the pattern of income distribution reflects the significant progress made by *Bumiputra* in increasing their employment and economic participation in modern sectors of economy....enable *Bumiputra*'s share of income in the higher brackets of the income distribution to improve' (Malaysia, 1991: 10-11).

Objective measurements, such as changes in the distribution of occupations and income, do not necessarily bring about appropriate or equal changes in the opinions, perceptions or attitudes of the people. We also need to understand the prevailing social and political attitudes of the different ethnic groups in the society in the light of the government's intensive measures to promote social mobility

and modernisation among the dominant Malays. For the purpose of examining this subjective dimension, the attitudes and perceptions of the Chinese and Malay subjects in the following two areas have been investigated:

(a) Issues of national interests and problems

The on-going social and political issues and problems in a society are also capable of bringing together people of different ethnic backgrounds. They may share their views, opinions, beliefs on, or attitudes towards certain things that directly or indirectly affect them. Conversely these issues and problems can also form a basis of interethnic conflict in the society. This depends on how the members of each ethnic group view the importance of, are actually affected by, or assess the effect or potential consequence of social and political issues, including national strategies and symbols and other problems in their everyday lives as citizens.

In this survey, among the other factors studied will be: i) the way in which people view the importance of the *Rukunegara*, the national ideology which was introduced after the 1969 riots to bring about greater unity among the people; ii) the seriousness of social problems faced by the country; and, iii) their attitudes (agreement or disagreement) on the following seven statements that reflects various social and political issues of national interests:

1) It is disgraceful if people fail to stand while the country's National Anthem is being played.

2) Compared to other countries, there is much racial discrimination in Malaysia.

3) People should not be dependent on government programmes; these destroy people's ability to look after themselves.

4) The Indonesian migrants are socially undesirable, they take our jobs away.

5) Those who are dissatisfied with Malaysia should emigrate to another country of their choice.

6) This country does not belong to the Malays alone, it belongs to all Malaysians.

7) A multi-ethnic population in this country has proven to be more advantageous than disadvantageous.

(b) Perceptions on ethnic relations

Malaysia is among the few countries in the world that is actively involved in implementing ethnic preferential public policies since Independence. Apart from the economic policy which is aimed at rectifying the ethnic imbalances in economic sectors, additional socio-cultural policies and political measures have also been implemented to bring about other social changes for unity and flexibility in the relations among ethnic groups. Thus, it is important to understand whether there is any trend towards mutual agreement in the opinions or perceptions of the people with respect to quality of ethnic relations at present, and whether they perceive any improvements by comparison with the past and for the future.

(iv) Organisational membership, choice of party and leader

One of the prominent and influential features of Malaysian society since before Independence is that of communal politics that have created organisational divisions among the Malays, Chinese and Indians. The ethnic organisational memberships, ethnic political parties and their ethnic leaders have played prominent roles in the way in which the people express the importance of their ethnic identity. This survey also aims to discover whether these ethnic boundaries are weakening, by looking at how the subjects express their wishes or choices in relation to their organisational membership, choice of political party and leader.

Findings

(i) Interethnic Contact and Intercultural Exposures

(a) Ethnic Composition of Neighbourhood

The ethnic composition of the neighbourhood does not really reveal the actual interethnic contact among the subjects, but it does tell us of the general interethnic exposure based on their residential areas. Unlike the Chinese, the Malays may not possibly experience wider interethnic exposure during their childhood. This is because the majority of them live in rural areas, whereas the Chinese majority live in urban residence.

On the whole, the general distribution of the ethnic population in the country is reflected in the childhood interethnic exposures among the subjects. As the findings

show, most of the Malay subjects (86%) had lived in Malay-dominated areas during their childhood, most likely in the rural areas. Only 45% of the Chinese had lived in Chinese-dominated areas in their early years and most likely in the older housing schemes in urban areas (Table 6.1). Only 14% of the Malays lived in mixed areas. The rest of the Chinese (55%), had been exposed to mixed ethnic surroundings. This includes 26% who had also lived in Malay-dominated areas and 29% who lived in other mixed areas.

Table 6.1
Ethnic Composition during Childhood, by Ethnic Group(%)

	Malays	Chinese
Mostly Malays	86	26
Mostly Chinese	1	45
Malay-Chinese equal	10	21
Other mixed areas	3	8
	100	100

Interethnic exposure in the neighbourhood at present showed that 57% of the Malays still live in mainly Malay areas (Table 6.2). Compared to their childhood, the percentage of Chinese who live in ethnic community enclosures has not reduced or, changed much. In fact, a 3% increase was noticed instead. It is not surprising that the percentage of the Malay subjects who lived in mixed ethnic areas has increased (43%). Since the Chinese dominated the urban areas in Malaysia from the beginning, there is not the same pattern of rural-urban migration among them in the search for better job opportunities in urban areas. In contrast, for the

Malays this is definitely the trend since Independence, especially after the implementation of the New Economic Policy.

Table 6.2
Ethnic Composition at Present, by Ethnic Group(%)

	Malays	Chinese
Mostly Malays	57	22
Mostly Chinese	13	48
Malay-Chinese equal	25	24
Other mixed areas	5	6
	100	100

In the post-Independence period, from 1957 to 1970, the proportion of Malays living in urban areas rose from 19.3% to 21.8% (Sidhu and Ahmad, 1978: 26). According to the Fifth Malaysia Plan (1986), the urban Malay population has increased drastically to 30%. With the government policies and strategies to increase Malay participation in modern economic sectors, they are encouraged to move to urban areas for better job opportunities. For example, the Malay labour force as part of the total manufacturing sector in 1970 was 29% and it increased to 46% in 1985 (Goh, 1991: 80). During this period, the expansion of the government sector also increased urban Malay population through the newly-established quasi-government corporations like The Council of Trust for the Indigenous People (MARA) and State Economic Development Corporation (SEDC) (Sharif, 1982: 85). Jesudason observes, 'The expansion of state enterprise, the vigorous promotion of Malay business, and the battery of regulations

imposed on private firms to employ Malays in rough proportion to their population now opened up a greater number of positions in the urban sector than before' (1990: 111).

(b) Usage of Language

As one of the intercultural exposures and exchanges among the subjects, the bilingual usage of common languages of Malay and English have developed extensively in Malaysia (Table 6.3).

Table 6.3: Percentage of Subjects Speaking Different Languages, by Ethnic Group

	Malays	Chinese
Mother tongue	100	100
Mother tongue only	30	0
Mother tongue & English	70	100
Malay & Chinese	6	100

The Malay and Chinese subjects, however, also indicate a strong adherence to using their mother tongue in their everyday lives. All of them were able to speak their mother tongue. Malay has commanded the number one position as a common language, as it is not only spoken by the Malays, but also by all the Chinese subjects. Only 70% of the Malays speak English. To a large extent, this bilingual trait can be accounted for by the nature of the sample used in this survey. The Malay and Chinese respondents, apart from their working experience, are also part-time degree course

students at university. Both their educational and working experiences would have exposed them to the use of both the Malay and English languages.

It is also important to note that Malay in Malaysia has also become the language of communication among the ordinary people who do not speak English. It has become a language of convenience, or "bazaar" language. English is still being widely used among the educated groups, especially among the non-Malays in their everyday interaction. The Malay language has been transmitted to the non-Malay groups of Chinese and Indians, rather successfully. But very few Malays speak Chinese or Tamil. This is because of the language policy of the country. The promotion of Malay as the sole official and national language of the country, especially through the education system, has successfully produced a new generation of non-Malay Malaysians who can speak the Malay language more fluently than the older generation of the non-Malays.

The common bilingual characteristic of the Malays and Chinese has also obviously exposed them to much wider interethnic contacts and intercultural communications and exchanges via other mass media like newspapers, television and radio. This was indicated by the subjects in their usage of language-based newspapers and television programmes where Malay and English continue to play a vital role (Tables 6.4 & 6.5).

Table 6.4: Percentage of Subjects Reading Different Language Newspapers, by Ethnic Group

	Malays	Chinese
Malay newspaper	99	90
Chinese newspaper	0	56
English newspaper	85	92

Table 6.5: Percentage of Subjects Viewing Different Language Programmes, by Ethnic Group

	Malays	Chinese
Malay programmes	99	83
Chinese programmes	70	93
Indian programmes	52	27
English programmes	99	99

Almost all the Malay subjects read the Malay newspapers, and 85% also read the English newspapers. A big majority of Chinese read the English (92%) and Malay (90%) newspapers. But only 56% read the Chinese newspapers (Table 6.4).

Among the Chinese, 93% watched Chinese television programmes, 99% English programmes and 83% Malay. 27% of them also watched Indian programmes. Both Malay and English programmes were watched by 99% of the Malays, and Chinese programmes by 70%. Just over half of them (52%) were also inclined to watch Indian programmes.

This is again not surprising as Malay and English are the media used widely in audio-visual broadcasts, and in newspapers circulated in Malaysia, compared to other ethnic language-based television programmes or newspapers. The

Malay and English-based media are more attractive, and easily available to inform anyone about the wider society and the world, politics, business and job opportunities, sports and entertainment.

The usage of these practical and convenient media of communications is not in any way to be seen as undermining the importance of Malaysian ethnicity, especially of the Chinese who have widely adopted the Malay language. The importance of the mother tongue to Chinese and Malay ethnicity is not eliminated from the Malaysian scene. This was indicated by the experiences of the subjects. For the Malays, the importance of their language to their culture and ethnicity has been strongly enhanced by granting it the status of the only official and national language. Although the Chinese have adopted the Malay language, the widespread use of the Chinese language firmly indicates that their different dialects are very much central to their culture and ethnicity. It continues to foster their ethnic ties and communication in the private spheres of their ethnic community. Thus, their use of Malay cannot really be understood to have infiltrated the intraethnic sphere of the Chinese community.

(ii) Interethnic Contacts

Interethnic contact is one of the important variables that can be used to measure the effect of modernisation on ethnic relations in a multiethnic society like Malaysia. We shall

explore the effect of changes in the interethnic contact exposures among the subjects on their social and political attitudes in the next chapter. But in this section, we shall explore the interethnic contact patterns among the subjects. The frequency of interethnic contact itself is a reliable indicator of the way in which modernisation and economic development in a society like Malaysia may bring together different ethnic groups into greater interaction and consequently lead to the weakening of the influence of ethnic attachments.

One of the main objectives of the Government's economic planning since 1970 is to increase the participation of the Malay population in the life and work of the urban areas and in the economic sectors. Unfortunately, there is not any publication of ethnic distribution in any particular modern industry for us to quote as an example, except the general statistics that show the changes in the ethnic labour force distribution in various occupational groups. However, in the Pioneer Programme which aimed to bring in foreign investment in the country, Jesudason writes, '...the pioneer firms roughly met the expectation that they hire Malays in proportion to population ratios; Malays constituted 42% of the labour force in pioneer firms...' (1990: 58).

The expansion of state enterprises, for example, through the National Corporation, National Equity Corporation, State Development Corporation and the Heavy Industry Corporation of Malaysia, has enabled the Government not only to increase

Malay-based investment, but also to provide greater employment opportunities for the Malays in the modern economic sectors, thus encouraging Malay urbanisation. We have earlier mentioned the increase of the Malay urban population and their participation in the manufacturing sector: the increase of the Malays in other modern sectors could have also produced greater interaction between the Malays and non-Malay populations in urban environments. For example, between 1970 and 1988, an increase in their participation occurred in clerical posts (35.4% to 55.1%), sales (26.7% to 36.5%), service industries (44.3% to 58.7%) and in production sectors (34.2% to 45.9%) (Malaysia, 1986: 104; 1988; 66). More importantly, the creation of the new Malay middle class and upper class (Ali, 1991: 112; Jesudason, 1990: 111-112; Khalid, 1993: 103-105) could have led to greater contact between ethnic groups members at workplaces and in residential areas in urban centres. With the ability to communicate in Malay and English, especially among the educated groups of middle and upper occupation categories, contact between the Malays, Chinese, and Indians is really only a matter of opportunities for meeting.

To the question of how often the subjects come into contact with members of other ethnic groups in general, the findings show that most of them have established frequent contact (Tables 6.6). Notably among the Chinese, 80% of them reported that they frequently interacted with members of other ethnic groups. Only 18% consider that their meeting takes place occasionally, and for a negligible 2%, this

contact rarely occurs. A slightly lower percentage (62%) of the Malays than the Chinese, maintained frequent contact with other ethnic group members, 31% occasionally and 7% seldom.

Table 6.6: Contact with Other Ethnic Groups, by Ethnic Group (%)

	Malays	Chinese
Frequently	62	80
Sometimes	31	18
Seldom	7	2
	100	100

Tables 6.7, 6.8 and 6.9 show the frequency of contact with different ethnic groups, including members of their own ethnic group. While the majority of the subjects may experience wide interethnic interaction, contact with their own ethnic group members also has been strongly preserved. Intraethnic interaction is still the most extensive among both the Malays and Chinese. Only 2% feel that contact with members of their own ethnic groups does not happen frequently.

More Chinese come into contact with the Malays (79% frequently and 20% sometimes) in comparison with the Malays' contact with the Chinese (56% frequently, 39% sometimes and 5% seldom). Both the Chinese and Malay subjects have social contact with the Indians too, members of the third major ethnic group, although not as much interactions take place

between the Chinese and the Malays. Among the Malays, 36% meet Indians frequently, 46% sometimes and 18% seldom, while 38% of the Chinese meet them frequently, 41% sometimes and 21% seldom. In part this reflects the relative size of the three groups.

Table 6.7: Contact with Malays, by Ethnic Group (%)

	Malays	Chinese
Frequently	98	79
Sometimes	2	20
Seldom	0	1
	100	100

Table 6.8: Contact with Chinese, by Ethnic Group (%)

	Malays	Chinese
Frequently	56	98
Sometimes	39	2
Seldom	5	0
	100	100

Table 6.9: Contact with Indians by Ethnic Group (%)

	Malays	Chinese
Frequently	36	38
Sometimes	46	41
Seldom	18	21
	100	100

As expected, opportunities for wider contact between ethnic groups among the subjects have presented themselves mainly in the workplace and residential settings. Table 6.10 shows

the result of the question asking the subjects where they come into contact with members of other ethnic groups. Interethnic contact among the Chinese and Malay subjects takes place more frequently at the workplace than at any other place (97% among the Chinese, 91% among the Malays). Other modern venues, like residential areas, shopping centres, public gatherings, formal organisations, parties and festivals, have also provided these opportunities. Among other important identified avenues for the Chinese are residential areas (54%), public gatherings (37%) and shopping centres (35%). Whereas for the Malays, these are shopping centres (54%), residential areas (52%) and public gatherings (36%).

Table 6.10: Percentage of Subjects Making Interethnic Contact in Different Places, by Ethnic Group

	Malays	Chinese
Residential areas	52	54
Workplace	91	97
Shopping centre	54	35
Children's school	4	3
Public functions	36	37
Organisation meetings	20	19
Other places	29	38

To the question about the occupational categories of those contacted, as shown in Table 6.11, most of the subjects contacted come from the general services occupational groups. This was indicated by 84% of the Chinese and 75% of the Malays. This is quite understandable because the

majority of the subjects also fall into this category. Like many other developing countries, this is one of the most rapidly growing sectors under the expansion of a capitalist economy in Malaysia. The growth of the middle range occupational groups is an urban phenomenon. This occupational section of the population in a multiethnic society should offer a wide opportunity for interethnic contact and greater appreciation of values of interethnic group tolerance and understanding. In the following questions, we should be able to measure whether the subjects' social and political attitudes are in accordance with their vast interethnic contact experiences.

Table 6.11:
Percentage of Subjects Who Come into Contact With Persons of Different Occupational Categories, by Ethnic Group (%)

	Malays	Chinese
Agricultural workers	10	12
Factory workers	17	13
General services	75	84
Business	18	8
Executive	17	22

(3) Attitudes and Perceptions

(a) Rukunegara

It will be unusual for the subjects not to remember the *Rukunegara*. The national ideology has been effectively publicised through media and exhibited in many important places in schools and government departments, especially

during the early years of its launch. It is repeated at school assemblies and occasionally will be included in the speeches of political leaders. Candidates who are called for interviews for government jobs will try to memorise the five principles of the *Rukunegara*, anticipating that the interviewers may ask about it. The government publication, the *Sixth Malaysia Plan* in 1991, still continued to enunciate the declaration and the principles of the national ideology in its opening page.

The subjects have accordingly demonstrated that they share an awareness of the national ideology. There are five principles in the *Rukunegara* that form the national ideology for integration. The majority of the Malays and the Chinese seem to be fully aware of all these principles (Table 6.12). Only 7% of the Malay subjects remember it partially, and 1% do not remember it at all. Among the Chinese, those who remember it partially are 11% and do not remember it at all, 2%.

Table 6.12: Rukunegara, by Ethnic Group (%)

	Malays	Chinese
Remember fully	91	87
Remember partly	7	11
Do not remember	1	2
	100	100

(b) National Social Problems

Both the Chinese and Malays have picked drug addiction and corruption as the primary two most important social problems among the national social problems listed (Tables 6.13). Corruption was indicated by 66% and drug addiction by 57% of the Chinese, whereas in the reverse pattern of priority, the Malays have picked drug addiction as the number one problem (62%) and corruption as second (46%).

Table 6.13: Percentage Who Believe These as Serious National Problems, by Ethnic Group

	Malays	Chinese
Unequal access to Education	6	50
Corruption	46	66
Political Disunity	36	21
Ethnic Differences	28	42
Religious Deviation	7	11
Drug Addiction	62	57
Poverty	32	28

There have been some immense 'national' incidents of corruption which made the public aware of it as a serious national problem. In early 1980s, Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad adopted the slogan, 'clean, efficient and trustworthy' in his new administration, and the National Bureau of Investigation made many arrests in connection with corruption. However, the important events of corruption that might have created a common awareness of this problem among the people are the Bank Rakyat scandal in the mid 1970s and the Bumiputra Malaysia Finance scandal in the early 1980s.

Many prominent Malay political leaders were implicated, and in the case of Bank Rakyat, the Chief Minister of Selangor was arrested and convicted.

One of the biggest corruption scandals that involved the Chinese leaders was the fraud in Deposit-Taking Co-operatives sponsored by the MCA. While the Chinese may recognise corruption practices among their ethnic group, they are more aware of the corruption among the Malay politicians. One of the reasons for this is the allegation of corruption and malpractices associated with government departments, and leaders usually brought up by the Chinese politicians (eg. Lim Kit Siang) of the opposition party (DAP). This may have prompted a higher awareness among the Chinese to highlight the inefficiency in the government administration and Malay leadership. On the other hand, the Malays could be influenced by their ethnic sentiments not to highlight such problems, as it will only tarnish the image of Malay leadership in the government.

Drug addiction, too, received much publicity when the government declared the problem as the number one national problem. The national agency called *Pemadam* was established to rehabilitate drug addicts. More importantly, as a punishment, a mandatory law was passed against the drug traffickers. Since then, many cases of police arrests and severe convictions of drug smugglers have been carried out which make the public more aware of this problem.

Although the Chinese and Malay subjects have commonly indicated corruption in Malaysia as the number one problem, as discussed above, their attitudes to some degree also seem to be influenced by ethnic perspective among them. Apart from this, there are three other problems to which both groups display different attitudes. These are political disunity (36% Malay and 21% Chinese), unequal access to education (6% Malay and 50% Chinese and ethnic differences (28% Malay and 42% Chinese). Other problems (religious deviation, poverty,) were not perceived as very important by both groups of subjects.

Means wrote, 'For the most part, UMNO had remained free of extreme factionalism, partly because of the strong leadership exercised by successive Prime Ministers and partly because of the extensive patronage available to placate the recurring factionalism which surfaced periodically' (1991: 199). This party is the backbone of Malay power and political supremacy in the government and society. But for the first time in the late 1980s, it faced serious factionalism following an open challenge for UMNO leadership among prominent Malay leaders. This gave rise to a crisis within UMNO leadership and factionalism between two groups, well known as "Team A" and "Team B" and has intensified the schism in the Malay community. As a consequence, another Malay party called *Semangat 46* was formed by a few former UMNO leaders and members to win Malay support. Although UMNO still commands strong support from the Malay community compared to more regional based parties

(*Semangat 46* and *PAS*), factionalism does cause some concern among the Malays and this can account for the Malay subjects' stronger emphasis than the Chinese on political disunity as a national problem. This problem of the UMNO and Malays does not seem to concern the Chinese greatly.

The Chinese, on the other hand, would regard unequal access to education and ethnic differences which concern them most as serious national problems. Since the implementation of the New Economic Policy (1970), the Chinese have faced a new era of ethnic preferential strategies by the Malaysian government that give priority to the education and economic advancement of the Malays. The Malays may be aware of these positive discriminatory strategies, and possibly a feeling of discontent among the Chinese. But, as the benefiting group, the Malays are not willing, or do not like, to admit that these are serious national problems. Conversely, as the group directly and adversely affected, the Chinese show disagreement with the Malays on interpreting these strategies, and more generally, the problem of 'ethnic differences' in Malaysia.

(c) Statements on Social and Political Issues

The subjects' attitudes on various statements of social and political issues are presented in Table 6.14. The tables show the percentage of subjects who ***agreed*** and ***disagreed*** with each statement. The category that ***agreed*** includes subjects who both ***strongly agreed*** and ***agreed*** to statements.

Similarly, the category that ***disagreed*** includes subjects who both ***strongly disagreed*** and ***disagreed*** to the statements. Differences in the levels of emphasis between the Malay and Chinese subjects on their agreement or disagreement can be a significant division. It can reflect a situation of uncertainty, non-committal attitudes and subtle conflict, or division between different ethnic groups regarding ethnically important political issues. Some of these divisions will be highlighted in the following analysis and discussion. Those who showed an indifferent attitude, including those who did not at all indicate their responses, were very marginal.

Table 6.14: Subjects' Responses to Statements Questions, by Ethnic Group (%)

Issues		Malays	Chinese
1. Standing for National Anthem			
	Agree	92	94
	Disagree	4	3
2. Racial Discrimination			
	Agree	15	50
	Disagree	82	46
3. Dependency on Government			
	Agree	82	82
	Disagree	17	16
4. Indonesian Migrants			
	Agree	50	53
	Disagree	46	44
5. Migration of Dissatisfied			
	Agree	73	33
	Disagree	23	58
6. Malaysia for All Malaysians			
	Agree	89	97
	Disagree	10	1
7. Advantages of Multiethnic			
	Agree	80	89
	Disagree	17	9

Differences in political views in the society were revealed by the Malay and Chinese subjects through dissimilarities in their attitudes concerning "ethnic discrimination" and "migration of the dissatisfied" in the statements questions. The Malay subjects do not think that racial discrimination in Malaysia is higher or worse than in other countries. An overwhelming majority (82%) refused to support the statement. 61% of them have strongly disagreed with it. But among the Chinese, only 46% could reject the statement, although most of them (40%) strongly expressed their disagreement. 50% of the Chinese think that racial discrimination in Malaysia is higher than in any other country.

On the statement that Malaysians should emigrate if dissatisfied in Malaysia, the Chinese, compared to the Malays, have expressed quite a different view. 58% of them do not agree with this view. Among these, 36% rejected the view with very strong attitudes of disagreement. Those among the Chinese who agreed only form 33%, and again only 9% among these very strongly agreed. As for the Malays, 72% of them agreed with the statement. A greater percentage (38%) also stressed this with a very strong attitude.

In the case of Malaysia, both the above issues refer to the ethnic preferential policy and its possible consequence of discontent among the non-Malays. Racial discrimination in Malaysia can be viewed only in reference to the government's ethnic preferential strategies or positive discrimination to

foster the Malays. The most important of these is the New Economy Policy. This policy is a direct result of the Malays' Constitutional 'special rights' in Malaysia. This 'special rights' permit positive official discrimination in favour of the improvement of the Malays in economy and education. The Malays, as argued earlier, cannot possibly see a policy that benefits them as a bad one, or Malaysia as worse than any other country in terms of racial discrimination. In recent years, however, the Malay leaders in the government have themselves openly and continuously reminded the Malays to be more independent in order to achieve the capability to compete successfully with the rest of the population in various economic sectors. The issue of dependency on government programmes, as such, has become a socially accepted view in the society. The Malay subjects did not object on paper to agree to it.

Even though the statement concerning migration of the dissatisfied does not directly mention the discontent of the non-Malays with the pro-Malay policy, the migration, or "brain-drain" problems in Malaysia is in fact very much the issue of the non-Malays (Means, 1991: 135). The Malays may not hesitate to support the idea that if anyone is dissatisfied with the government's public policies of Malay preference they should migrate. Referring to the comment of the former Deputy Prime Minister, Musa Hitam, Means wrote, 'The government of most countries would become concerned about the 'brain drain' of highly educated professional and the loss of investments being transferred abroad. Instead,

Musa Hitam, after revealing that 16,864 Malaysians (mostly Chinese) had departed and acquired foreign citizenship, stated that they had been *thorns in the flesh when they were still in this country....Their departure is no loss to Malaysia*'(1991: 135).

The migration of the Chinese and Indians to other countries like Australia, Canada, the United States and Britain has always been seen as a result of their dissatisfaction and antagonistic attitude towards the ethnic preferential strategies and its constraints on them. Many non-Malay students who cannot obtain entrance to local universities, go overseas for further education. The Chinese (and other non-Malays) feel much more strongly than the Malays about racial discrimination in Malaysia. They also do not see any justice in encouraging any dissatisfied Malaysians to migrate.

To other statements which refer to noble acts, or attitudes, like standing for the *national anthem*, *Malaysia for all* and *advantage of a multiethnic Malaysian society*, or general social issues like *Indonesian immigrants*, the Malays and Chinese agree largely. In the case of *Malaysia for all*, however, it is also interesting to take note of the differences between the Malays and Chinese on the emphasis, or level of their positive commitment to the statement. 81% of the Chinese very strongly agreed compared to 59% of the Malays who just agreed. There seem to be "second thoughts" among the Malays that makes them hesitate to agree promptly

with a very strong conviction of acceptance, like the Chinese, that Malaysia does not belong to the Malays alone, but to all Malaysians.

The above attitude again seems to reflect, although not in an open manner, the fundamental contradiction of the political aspirations between the Malays and non-Malays. The principle political argument among the Malays in establishing the pro-Malay policies in nation building and development processes is that historically Malaysia is their country, whereas the Chinese and Indians are only immigrants, or the descendants of the immigrant peoples of China and India. For the non-Malays, their ideal aspiration has always been to see Malaysia not as a Malays' country, but a country for all Malaysians. This brought about the idea of Malaysians' Malaysia in the 1960's among some of their leaders. Although the non-Malays' leaders may have openly abandoned the concept of Malaysian Malaysia in their political struggle, especially after the 1969 riot, the issue and the aspiration still remains in the minds of the non-Malays.

(d) Ethnic Relations

It is not an easy thing for the Malays and Chinese to ignore their difference in perceiving certain important issues that strain their relations in Malaysia. While any avoidance of open conflict in the society is very much appreciated in Malaysia, it may not possibly encourage people to view

ethnic relations in Malaysia in an overwhelmingly positive fashion.

The subjects have indicated that although the quality of ethnic relations in Malaysia today is not bad; at the same time, the Malays and Chinese have demonstrated hesitation in expressing promptly the situation as good (Table 6.15). Among the Malays, 51% described the situation as only moderate and 49% described it as good. Similarly, about 51% of the Chinese chose to describe ethnic relations in Malaysia today as moderate, and 48% as good. Their opinion did not change much when describing the situation of residential locality, except a slightly higher percentage of Chinese showed confidence in the quality of ethnic relations.

Table 6.15: Quality of Ethnic Relations in Malaysia and Locality at Present, by Ethnic Group (%)

	Malaysia		Locality	
	Malays	Chinese	Malays	Chinese
Good	49	48	52	63
Moderate	51	51	46	33
Bad	0	1	1	4
	100	100	100	100

On the whole, the majority of the Malays in the society think that their disadvantaged position, compared to the Chinese, is still an important agendum to be solved in order to improve ethnic relations in Malaysia. They strongly feel that the continuation of the ethnic preferential economic

policy is still necessary and justified. The Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad said, 'The struggles of the Malays are not over. They have not achieved the development which can help them compete successfully with others in a plural society like Malaysia. Hence, they have not achieved the level where they can compete with other communities in the world' (quote from Goh, 1991:91). For this reason, the Malays will not express an optimistic view of present ethnic relations either in Malaysia or in their specific areas.

However, comparing the situation to five years ago, the majority of the Malay subjects believe that relations have improved in Malaysia (63%) and in their locality (60%) (Table 6.16). This is again consistent with their support for the ethnic preferential policy which seems to produce positive results. But among the Chinese, a lower percentage were inclined to perceive the present situation as an improvement (52% in Malaysia and 43% in the locality).

Table 6.16: Ethnic Relations in Malaysia and Locality: 5 years ago, by Ethnic Group (%)

	Malaysia		Locality	
	Malays	Chinese	Malays	Chinese
Has Improved	69	52	60	43
Remain the Same	27	42	38	54
Has Deteriorated	4	6	2	3
	100	100	100	100

As for the projection question, an optimistic view prevailed among 70% of the Malays and slightly lower among the Chinese subjects (60%) who think that ethnic relations in Malaysia will improve in the next five years (Table 6.17). A similar opinion was expressed about the situation in locality. An optimistic view was expressed by 67% of the Malays and 56% of the Chinese. A more pessimistic view seemed to prevail among the Chinese (39% at national level and 44% at local level) than the Malays (30% and 33% at national and local levels respectively).

Table 6.17: Ethnic Relations in Malaysia and Locality in the Next 5 Years, by Ethnic Group (%)

	Malaysia		Locality	
	Malays	Chinese	Malays	Chinese
Will Improve	70	60	67	56
Remain the Same	26	29	31	40
Will Deteriorate	4	10	2	4
	100	100	100	100

(iv) Ethnic Organisational Membership, Party and Leader

On the question of ethnic organisational membership, it clearly shows that ethnicity is very much a central and continuing feature of Malaysian society. This ethnic orientation is reflected by 63% of the Malays, and 80% of the Chinese who have already become members, or wish to become members of an ethnic organisation that caters for their ethnic group interest (Table 6.18).

Table 6.18: Organisational Membership, by Ethnic Group (%)

	Malays	Chinese
Yes	34	24
Wish to	29	56
Do Not Wish to	37	35
Undecided	0	5
	100	100

The inequality in political power distribution between the Malays and non-Malays in ruling and formulating public policies also appears to have effected their inclination to join ethnic organisations. The Malays seem to have less inclination (29%) than the Chinese (56%). Compared to the Chinese, the Malays have been enjoying the security of their political hegemony and economic and socio-cultural benefits under the stable Malay-dominated government. This feeling of political security and contentment that their ethnic group interests are taken care of, could have lowered the urgency for them to join any ethnic, chiefly political organisation.

The situation is very much different for the Chinese. Having marginal political power and status in the ruling government, they may seek support through participation in various ethnic organisations. Among the most influential Chinese 'non-political' organisations are Chinese education and teachers' associations. Yet the non-Malays' marginal political influence within the larger political system could drain their enthusiasm from becoming members of ethnic organisation. Only 24% of the Chinese subjects actually have

become members of ethnic organisations compared to 34% of the Malays.

The inclination in favour of ethnic organisations does not seem to stop the subjects from reflecting pragmatic attitudes by making common choices of political parties and leaders to rule the country. This pragmatic approach reflects the limited political choices that prevail in Malaysia. Both Malay and Chinese subjects show preferential attitudes towards the ruling *National Front* party and a non-royal Malay candidate as the best choice of leader, probably for the prime minister's post, than any others to govern the state (Table 6.19).

Table 6.19: Choice of Political Party, by Ethnic Group (%)

	Malays	Chinese
National Front (NF)	76	76
Democratic Action Party(DAP)	0	3
Islamic Party (PAS)	14	0
Socialist Party	2	2
Do not Know	8	16
Others	0	3
	100	100

76% of the Malays and Chinese subjects have chosen the National Front as their preferred political party to govern Malaysia's multiethnic society. Among the Malays, 14% have also chosen the Islamic Party, *PAS*, and 2% the Socialist Party. Predictably none of the Malays was in favour of the non-Malay dominated Democratic Action Party (DAP). On the

other hand, none of the Chinese was in favour of the Islamic Party of the Malays. However, only a negligible 3% of the Chinese have indicated DAP as their choice.

On the choice of hypothetical leader,[1] the Malay and Chinese subjects chose a Malay candidate instead of a Chinese as the best choice for leadership of the country (probably for the post of prime minister). They also indicated an ordinary Malay (Zulkifli) instead of a royal personage (Halim) as their preferred choice. As for the Malays, this was indicated by 86%, but for the Chinese, however, only 50% of them chose Zulkifli (Table 6.20).

Table 6.20: Choice of Leader, by Ethnic Group (%)

	Malays	Chinese
Halim	9	12
Ong Cheng Piaw	1	4
Zulkifli	86	50
Wong Ting Seng	1	17
Others	3	18
	100	100

We cannot conclude that the subjects have left behind their strong ethnic orientation. Ethnic political parties, ethnic leaders, and the manipulation of ethnic issues remain the core features of Malaysian politics as well as within the ruling coalition *National Front* party itself. We need not forget that the *National Front* disguises the ethnically

1. The relevant hypothetical question was first introduced by Sanusi Osman (1981). Subsequently, this was repeated by Mansor (1992).

defined components within it (mainly UMNO MCA and MIC). Since Independence, UMNO, the dominant Malay power, and its leaders in the ruling *Alliance/National Front* party have been in the forefront of leadership representing Malay political hegemony in Malaysian politics.

The political cooperation among the leaders of major ethnic political organisations has avoided direct political confrontation among ethnic groups. On the other hand, there is not (and has never been) any strong alternative single multiethnic, or coalition of ethnic parties which can mobilise support from all the ethnic groups to challenge the Alliance/*Barisan Nasional* for leadership. Alliance/National Front and the Malay leaders have since then become the only practical choices available for the majority of the people to form a stable government and consequently avoid overt ethnic conflict.

Almost none of the Malay subjects seem to feel there is any relevance in choosing a Chinese candidate, probably as the Malaysian Prime Minister. For minority groups like the Chinese, it is also inconceivable to think of their ethnic candidate for any important leadership post, let alone the post of Prime Minister. The Chinese subjects obviously know this and for practical reasons they too indicate the Malay candidate as a best choice, although by a much lower percentage (50%) than the Malays (86%). While the Chinese may be reluctant, for practical reasons, to think of a Malaysian Chinese candidate for an important leadership post

in Malaysia, 21% of them still seem to think, or may 'wish the impossible to come true' by indicating their interest in the Chinese candidates.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter discusses some aspects of social changes among Malaysians that could indicate the development of commonalities in the process of development and nation-building of a multiethnic Malaysian society. The findings of the subjects' experiences and attitudes show vast contradictions between the Malays and Chinese in several ethnically important areas. The Malay and Chinese individuals seem to have more in common than differences only in the areas which are not ethnically very sensitive. Initial analysis of the associations between the genders and the responses pertaining to the discussion in this chapter indicated very small differences. Thus, this does not modify the validity of the conclusion presented here. This data is presented in Appendix III.

Wide interethnic and intercultural exposure and contacts in modern social settings may, as some may argue, lead to a reduction in the salience of particularistic norms of ethnic group identity and orientations. But this study does not render support for such an argument in the case of Malaysia. Although the subjects in this study are bilingual in the use of common languages and experiencing wide interethnic contacts, these experiences, however, only show that they

have come to accept the importance of, or need for, some pragmatic attitudes with regards to the constraints and choices they can make in a multiethnic Malaysian society. A common practical attitude is also reflected in the subjects' choice of political party and leader to govern a multiethnic Malaysian society. They also share common attitudes in connection with national symbols and ideology and other social issues which are relatively trivial for one to anticipate strong ethnic sentiments. Therefore, one cannot possibly argue in support of the prevailing strength of integration over conflict as an overriding force in the relations among ethnic groups in Malaysia, or that ethnic divisions and the importance of ethnicity among Malaysians have diminished.

In fact, the wide use among the Chinese and Malays of common languages like Malay and English, and other related media, cannot be perceived as having occurred at the expense of their ethnicity. This is definitely not the case with the Malays, since the promotion of their language as an important element of national identity is well taken care of by the government's policy. For the Chinese, on the other hand, their ethnicity, particularly the language component, could be perceived to be in direct competition for survival with the expansion of Malay as the common national and official language of Malaysia. But the Malay language has not yet taken the core position of Chinese or English as a communication language in their more personal, intimate,

informal and private interactions at the intraethnic circles of the Chinese community.

We must instead take into consideration two important factors to ensure that what the subjects have reflected in their responses in this study is a real sign of the weakening in the strength of their ethnicity. First, we should examine the way in which the subjects have responded to the questions that are directly or indirectly related to controversial political or ethnic issues. Second, we should interpret their responses in the context of wider public policies and political scene that may have strongly shaped the subjects' experiences and the way in which the responses were expressed. We should not average the responses from the findings to form an overall impression. In this context, we obviously cannot overlook how and why the subjects have responded significantly in different ways to certain questions that are ethnically more sensitive or provocative than other questions.

On some highly important questions, there is not a widely shared common concern. An ethnic perspective seems to influence the way in which the Malay and Chinese subjects express their concern over the social problems. The Malays and Chinese, for example, maintained different attitudes towards two problems which are ethnically more divisive and crucial than the others. These are unequal access to education and the significance of ethnic differences. The Malays could not see access to education as unequal, or in

general, ethnic differences as problems crucial to themselves. The Chinese view these two factors as crucial cultural and political issues in Malaysia. The Chinese' concern over these problems reveal the ongoing conflict in ethnic relations in Malaysia. The notable fact is that Malays see 'no problem'; whereas the Chinese see an important problem. 'No problem' is characteristic of the dominant group.

The subjects have revealed some sharp differences in their attitudes on the issues of racial discrimination, migration of dissatisfied Malaysians, and subtly on the issue of Malaysia for all. It is not an easy thing for the Malays and Chinese to ignore their differences in perceiving these important issues that strain their relations in Malaysia. While any avoidance of open conflict in the society may be very much appreciated in Malaysia, this may not also possibly encourage people to view ethnic relations in an overwhelmingly optimistic way. The Chinese notably do not seem to regard the changes under the New Economic Policy as a positive trend towards integration. On the question of ethnic organisational membership, it clearly shows that ethnicity is very much a central and continuing feature of contemporary Malaysian society, although the need for a pragmatic approach to suit the political power relationship is very much recognised by the subjects. But the demand for such a practical political approach is much greater among the members of the minority ethnic group, the Chinese, than

among the members of the dominant ethnic group, the Malays, who possess political supremacy in the society.

The subjects, as our discussion shows, have demonstrated that issues and strategies of differential treatments are still matters of great concern, discontent, and conflict among ethnic groups, especially between the Malays and Chinese. Their responses to a few important issues and problems are related to the fundamental divisions of unequal legitimate rights and unequal political, economic, cultural power and status between the Malays and non-Malays in the society. These political divisions which continue to persist in Malaysian society have not only enhanced the salience of ethnicity in the country but also can undermine the integrative forces and pose potential future conflict in the society.

Chapter 7

THE INFLUENCE OF EXPOSURE TO INTERETHNIC CONTACTS AND OCCUPATIONAL BACKGROUND ON SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES

In chapter 1 we explored the development of the political, economical and social changes in Malaysian society from an historical perspective since the period of colonial rule. Since achieving independence, the Government has concentrated on the efforts of nation-building with the main aim of bringing greater unity among the peoples of different ethnic origins. The motto *Satu bangsa, Satu bahasa* which literally means 'one nation, one language', has been the idealistic political aspiration of the Malaysian government. Subsequent to the riot in 1969, the Government has intensified its efforts in creating a politically, economically and culturally integrated Malaysian society. The New Economic Policy was introduced as a twenty year master plan (1970-1990) with the main objective of 'restructuring society'. In this context it becomes important to study the persistence or the weakening of ethnic divisions in Malaysia in the course of modernisation and economic development in the society.

The major concern of the government in its efforts to bring about changes for 'restructuring society' is to reduce the disparities in the economic and social advantages between the Malays and the non-Malays. The Malays are the focus of this effort. This is because they are generally looked upon as a disadvantaged group in comparison to the non-Malays in

their participation in modern economic sectors and urban life. The disadvantaged position of the Malays is seen by the Government as the main cause for their radical and hostile attitudes towards the non-Malays, in particular the Chinese. The Chinese are far ahead of the Malays in their involvement and ownership of wealth in the modern economic sectors and employment, and participation in the modern urban life (see chapter 1). The continued confinement of the Malays to their traditional economy and rural areas has caused great concern among the Malay leaders. This has strengthened Malay economic nationalism and the political mobilisation of ethnic group solidarity in the post-independence period. The sense of economic inferiority may also strengthen their prejudice, distrust, and antagonistic, intolerant and unsympathetic attitudes towards the non-Malay's problems, aspirations and struggles for equal citizenship rights, multi-culturalism and equal opportunities. Similarly, by living separate lives from the Malays, the non-Malays are probably encouraged to preserve their own ethnic sentiments, prejudice, social distance, distrust, disregard and hostile attitudes towards the Malays and their problems.

Modernisation in general is seen as a social process that would weaken traditional ethnic attachments by breaking up the physical, economical, cultural and social boundaries that reinforce ethnic consciousness and ethnic alignment. Living in ethnic neighbourhoods and working in these surroundings, such as that characterising traditionally

separated economic activity, reinforce such boundaries. By bringing modernisation to the Malays, the Government hopes to produce desirable social benefits for unity. When ethnic groups work together in modern sectors, primarily in manufacturing, and live in mixed ethnic residential areas in urban centres, they are expected to increase inter-ethnic sociability. The increase in social contacts is expected to reduce ethnic prejudice and intolerance. When Malays enjoy upward social mobility, this is expected to reduce the sense of being disadvantaged. This in turn would reduce their ethnically defined jealousies and resentment. All these changes mean that 'balanced' participation between the Malays and non-Malays in modern economic sectors and urban living is expected eventually to dilute the influence of ethnic sentiments in their daily lives, and in their social and political attitudes. If these changes can undermine parochial attitudes based on ethnicity, it is presumed that this will reduce ethnic conflict in society. However, this could be only one of the possible effects. Social changes in society may also reinforce the salience of ethnicity, exacerbating antagonistic attitudes and bringing about deterioration in relations between ethnic groups.

It could be argued that social changes in the post-Independence period in Malaysia have brought about more universal values and shared attitudes in the society. Based on this assumption, the extent of the differences between the Malay and Chinese subjects was explored in Chapter 6. The aim was to examine to what extent there may have been

rapprochement among the Malays and Chinese, as a consequence of social changes in the society, and how they may have come close in their social and political attitudes through the use of a common language and in their interethnic proximity and contact. The survey showed that while the experiences of the Malay and Chinese subjects indicate that some common features and attitudes have developed in society, there is no reason for one to believe that the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia has been weakened. The Malay and Chinese subjects still maintain significant differences in their political attitudes when it comes to issues and problems that are ethnically salient.

The main aim of the present chapter is to further explore the relationship between the measures of modernisation and social and political attitudes. By creating a new pattern of interethnic interactions and contacts in society, modernisation is believed to invoke changes in people's attitudes and their considerations for acts of ethnic preference and attachments. Among others, modernisation is expected to bring a greater understanding of the problems, needs, aspirations and political rights of the people of different ethnic groups.

Among the important structural factors believed to produce such changes in attitudes, is the physical proximity between groups that were, to a large extent previously separated. In the present chapter, we propose to test the contact hypothesis contained in this theory of modernisation. For

this purpose, we shall concentrate on the effects of interethnic contact that arises from living in close proximity in mixed ethnic neighbourhood areas on the social and political attitudes of the Malay and Chinese subjects. Through such contacts people are expected to display the attitudes of an integrated society. To justify this, we need to demonstrate that the differences in the social and political attitudes among the Malay and Chinese subjects can be attributed to the measures of interethnic contact.

Another factor that is closely related to modernisation and economic development and which may have an impact on ethnicity in a society is the emergence of different economic classes as a result of diversification of occupational and economic activities among the people. In observing this development, and its impact on ethnic relations in Malaysia, Ali pointed out that class divisions are not only formed within each ethnic group but also cut across ethnic groups, although the Malays, Chinese and Indians may be concentrated in different economic functions (1991: 105). Being in different economic classes may effect people's opportunity for intergroup contact. They may also act and show different attitudes toward the social and political issues and problems on the basis of their class positions in society. What we are interested in here is to see whether or not the Malay and Chinese subjects' social and political attitudes could also be attributed to their differences in economic class backgrounds. This forms the second aim of this chapter.

Exposures to Interethnic Contacts

In the previous chapter, the data analysis showed that at present both the Chinese and Malays have wide contacts with one another (see Tables 6.11- 6.18). To restate the result briefly, it showed that the majority (86%) of the Malay subjects lived in Malay neighbourhood areas during their childhood. This figure has been reduced to 57% at present. However, there was not much change in the residence patterns of Chinese subjects. Those who had lived in a Chinese ethnic neighbourhood during childhood was 45%, compared with 48% at present. We will now proceed to speculate on the relationship between the different degrees of exposure to interethnic contact among the subjects and their responses to the questions on ethnic attitudes. In order to do this we need a clear understanding of the different degrees of exposures to interethnic contacts by taking into account both the childhood and present exposures of the subjects.

In Chapter 6, different exposures to interethnic contacts among the subjects during their childhood and at present were measured and presented through four categories (Tables 6.1-6.4). These represent those who lived, or are living, in areas where ethnic composition consists: (i) mostly of people from similar ethnic backgrounds; (ii) mostly Chinese (for Malay subjects) or mostly Malays (for Chinese subjects); (iii) of Malays and Chinese in equal proportions; or (iv) of other mixed areas. Before we analyse the impact of different degrees of exposures to interethnic contacts to

the attitude questions, it is essential to understand the patterns and degree of shifting and continuity in the subjects' interethnic contact from childhood to adulthood period.

For the purpose of data analysis in this chapter, four categories of subjects reflecting the different types of changes in their interethnic contact experiences were classified. They are:

(a) Those who have lived during their childhood, and are still living at present, in areas where the ethnic composition consists of own ethnic members (mostly).

(b) Those who have lived during their childhood in their own ethnic areas but are now living in mixed areas.

(c) Those who have lived during their childhood in mixed areas but now living in their own ethnic areas.

(d) Those who not only have lived in mixed ethnic areas during their childhood but are also still living in such areas.

In terms of the degree of changes, the two middle groups (b, c) have experienced a significant change in their contact experiences compared to the other groups. It is important to see whether these groups show any significant differences in their attitudes from those who still live within a traditional ethnic community, or even from those who have continuously lived in heterogeneous communities.

Table 7.1 shows the continuity and shift in the Malay and Chinese subjects' interethnic contact exposure from their childhood to the present time. Among the Malays, out of the

139 subjects who initially lived in areas dominated by own ethnic members during their childhood, 81 (50%) now still live in Malay ethnic areas, whereas 58 (36%) have moved to ethnically mixed areas. Not many had lived in mixed ethnic areas during their childhood (23, or 14%). Among them, 12 (7%) now live in areas where the ethnic composition is dominated by their own ethnic members. The other 11 (7%) remained in the areas of mixed ethnic members.

Table 7.1:
Continuity and Changes in Interethnic Contact Exposure Among The Malay and Chinese Subjects (%)

Types of Changes	Malay	Chinese
(a) E -> E	81 (50%)	45 (29%)
(b) E -> M	58 (36%)	25 (16%)
(c) M -> E	12 (7%)	29 (19%)
(d) M -> M	11 (7%)	56 (36%)
Total	162	155

E->E: Ethnic areas (childhood) to Ethnic areas (now)
E->M: Ethnic areas (childhood) to Mixed ethnic areas (now)
M->E: Mixed areas (childhood) to Ethnic areas (now)
M->M: Mixed areas (childhood) to Mixed areas (now)

Among the Chinese subjects, 70 of them had lived in 'own ethnic' dominated neighbourhood, during childhood, and 85 had lived in ethnically mixed areas. Out of those who originally lived in their own ethnic areas, 45 (29%) now still continue to live in such areas, whereas 25 (16%) now live in mixed areas. Of those who originally lived in mixed areas, 29 (19%) are now living in own ethnic dominated

areas, whereas 56 (36%) of them still continue to live in mixed areas.

For the Malay subjects, we will concentrate on the attitudes expressed by the group who throughout their lives have lived in 'own ethnic' areas and the group who have moved to a mixed area. This is because the other two groups are too small in number for any meaningful conclusion to be drawn. For the responses of the Chinese subjects, for the same reason, we shall compare the attitudes between the group who throughout their life lived in 'own ethnic' areas and the group who throughout their life lived in 'mixed ethnic' areas.

Responses to the Statements questions

Seven statements asking the subjects to indicate their level of agreement, or disagreement were presented to them. As we already know, the statements are in regard to: (i) standing for national anthem; (ii) racial discrimination in Malaysia; (iii) dependency on government programmes; (iv) Indonesian emigrants; (v) emigration of dissatisfied Malaysians; (vi) Malaysia as a country for all Malaysians; and (vii) advantages of a multi-ethnic population.

Four issues from the above statement questions need our attention more than the others in this analysis. These are issues pertaining to racial discrimination, Malaysia for all Malaysians, the emigration of dissatisfied Malaysians and

the advantages of a multiethnic population in Malaysia. These issues directly or indirectly touch on the main issues of ethnic relations in Malaysia. The Malay subjects' responses are presented in Table 7.2. The categories of *agree* and *disagree* respectively also include those who have *strongly agreed* and *strongly disagreed* to the statements.

Table 7.2: The Malay Subjects' Responses to Statements Questions, by Interethnic Contact Exposure (%)

Issues		EE	EM
1. Standing for National Anthem			
	Agree	92	91
	Disagree	4	7
2. Racial Discrimination			
	Agree	13	12
	Disagree	85	85
3. Dependency on Government			
	Agree	77	90
	Disagree	22	10
4. Indonesian Migrants			
	Agree	52	50
	Disagree	43	47
5. Emigration of Dissatisfied			
	Agree	68	76
	Disagree	27	22
6. Malaysia for All Malaysians			
	Agree	91	88
	Disagree	9	12
7. Advantageous of Multiethnic			
	Agree	83	78
	Disagree	14	19

EE: Ethnic areas (childhood) to Ethnic areas (now)
EM: Ethnic areas (childhood) to Mixed ethnic areas (now)

Among the Malay subjects, no great difference in attitudes was observed between the group with greater contact experience and the group with less contact experience concerning the above issues. Both groups of Malays show

strong agreement in standing for the national anthem (91% to 92%), dependency on government programmes (77% to 90%), emigration of dissatisfied Malaysians (68% to 76%), Malaysia belongs to all Malaysians (88% to 91%) and the advantages of a multiethnic population (78% to 83%). Both groups are equally divided on the issue of Indonesian migrants, and on the issue of racial discrimination they expressed strong disagreement.

None of these responses indicates that greater interethnic contact among the Malay subjects has produced a more 'soothing' effect on their political attitudes concerning key issues. Their all-embracing attitude to see Malaysia as a country for all Malaysians cannot be attributed to the 'contact effect'. This is because the Malays without wider contact experience have also demonstrated the same attitude. A synonymous argument also applies in the response to their greater appreciation of the multiethnic feature of Malaysian society.

On the issues of racial discrimination and emigration of dissatisfied Malaysians, evidence clearly show that interethnic contact did not bring about greater concern among the Malays on the ethnic problems in Malaysia. The Malays who lived in ethnically mixed areas equally show a strong tendency to reject the view that racial discrimination in Malaysia is higher or worse than other countries. Although the Malays are aware that the New Economic Policy is an ethnic preferential policy in favour

of them, they could not perceive it as a discriminating policy towards the non-Malays. In the case of the emigration of dissatisfied Malaysians, greater contact again failed to produce a more 'tolerant' attitude towards those who may not be happy with the government policy. They supported the emigration of dissatisfied Malaysians.

Among the Chinese, despite their differences in contact experiences, there was not much difference in their attitudes on all issues (Table 7.3). They expressed agreement to standing for the national anthem (93%-96%), dependency on government programmes (84% to 85%), Indonesian migrants (54% to 55%), Malaysia for all Malaysians (96% to 100%) and the advantages of a multiethnic population (85% to 87%). On the issue of racial discrimination, both groups were rather divided in their attitudes, compared to that of the Malays (45% to 58% agree and 35% to 53% disagree). On the issue of Indonesian migrants, the division is more equal among both groups.

The Chinese response, however, indicates that those with wider contact experience are slightly less concerned about racial discrimination in Malaysia. This seems to suggest that contacts have produced more positive and tolerant attitudes towards the ethnic preferential policy. They also show slightly higher disagreement on the emigration of dissatisfied Malaysians. But their disagreement could also mean a greater awareness of and opposition to the government policy that may force the non-Malays to emigrate.

Table 7.3: The Chinese Subjects' Responses to Statements Questions, by Interethnic Contact Exposure (%)

Issues		EE	MM
1. Standing for National Anthem			
	Agree	96	93
	Disagree	2	4
2. Racial Discrimination			
	Agree	58	45
	Disagree	35	53
3. Dependency on Government			
	Agree	85	84
	Disagree	11	16
4. Indonesian Migrants			
	Agree	54	55
	Disagree	44	43
5. Emigration of Dissatisfied			
	Agree	36	34
	Disagree	53	59
6. Malaysia for All Malaysians			
	Agree	100	96
	Disagree	0	4
7. Advantageous of Multiethnic			
	Agree	85	87
	Disagree	13	11

EE: Ethnic areas (both in childhood and now))
MM: Mixed ethnic areas (both in childhood and now)

Rating on National Problems

Among the issues presented to these respondents, there are two issues which are the most salient to ethnic relations in Malaysia. These are unequal access to education and ethnic differences. Ethnic differences refer to the more general way in which people perceive problems that may exist between the ethnic groups in the society. But the problem of unequal opportunity to education is actually one of the strategies in the government's New Economic Policy.

Regardless of the differences in the levels of exposure to interethnic contact, the Malay subjects maintained a very similar pattern of high and low concerns as to the various national social problems (Table 7.4). For example, in all the groups, drug addiction and corruption were considered the most serious social problems. A medium level of concern was expressed over political disunity, poverty, or ethnic differences. The problems with the lowest rating among these groups were religious deviation and unequal access to education. This shows that the Malays with a wider contact experience did not show any greater concern for the problems related to ethnic relations in Malaysia. Their concern almost equalled the group without much contact experience, on the problems of unequal access to education (26% compared to 27%) and ethnic differences (3% compared to 4%).

Table 7.4:
Percentage of Malay subjects who believe this is a National Problem, by Interethnic Contact Exposure

Problems	EE	EM
Corruption	41	47
Religious Deviation	5	7
Poverty	36	28
Drug Addiction	58	62
Political Disunity	41	34
Unequal Access to Education	4	3
Ethnic Differences	27	26

The Chinese subjects, too, did not show much difference in the rating of various national problems (Table 7.5). The two most pressing problems for these subjects were corruption and drug addiction. However, two additional problems have

also been rated as crucial throughout all the groups besides corruption and drug addiction. These are ethnic differences and unequal access to education. The percentage of subjects who stressed these problems in all groups come close, if not equal, or higher in some instances to those who stressed corruption and drug addiction. Less concern was shown over poverty and political disunity. While the concern for unequal access to education is very high and drastically opposite to that of the Malays' response, no differences were noticed between the 'contact' groups among Chinese (52% and 53%). But the positive effect of contact seems to have reduced their concern for ethnic differences from 58% to 34%.

Table 7.5:
Percentage of the Chinese Subjects who believe this is a National Problem, by Interethnic Contact Exposure

Problems	EE	MM
Corruption	66	71
Religious Deviation	9	14
Poverty	22	27
Drug Addiction	56	59
Political Disunity	22	25
Unequal Access to Education	53	52
Ethnic Differences	58	34

Rating on Ethnic Relations

As shown in Tables 7.6 and 7.7 wider contact experience among the Malay and Chinese subjects was not able to produce a favourable attitude concerning 'ethnic relations' in Malaysia. Both the Malay groups with different levels of interethnic exposure, hesitated to describe 'ethnic

relations' in Malaysia as being 'good'. 43% of the subjects with a wider contact and 46% of the subjects with a lower contact experience described the relations as moderate. Among the Chinese subjects an unfavourable attitude was even higher without much difference between the groups (51% to 52%).

Table 7.6: Ethnic Relations in Malaysia, by Interethnic Contact Exposure among Malays (%)

	EE	EM
Good	55	57
Moderate	46	43
Bad	0	0
	100	100

Table 7.7: Ethnic Relations in Malaysia, by Interethnic Contact Exposure among Chinese (%)

	EE	MM
Good	47	48
Moderate	51	52
Bad	2	0
	100	100

Occupational Background

A modern occupational structure based on economic classes, has become an important foundation for social stratification in modern society. The occupational hierarchy offers different status and material benefits to people in society. People assess their success according to the position they occupy in the occupational hierarchy compared with others. Those who experience an upward mobility, or occupy a higher

occupational class position, would relatively be the most 'satisfied' group compared to those in the lower or disadvantaged class positions. Class situation forms the basis for people to estimate their comparative advantages and disadvantages in relation to other ethnic groups. In a society like Malaysia, higher class positions also would mean that these people have a better chance of being exposed to modern lifestyles and attitudes. Higher occupational status could also be more conducive than lower occupational status for intergroup contact. In observing these changes in Malaysia, Ali (1991: 103-105), for example, sees greater interconnection and cooperation politically, economically and socially between the Malays and Chinese of upper and middle classes in Malaysia (1991: 103-105). While he agrees that there may be some interethnic cooperation among the lower class especially among factories workers occasionally, overall he states, 'between the predominantly Malay peasants and the largely Chinese workers, there is a great social distance, and often their ignorance of each other's values has led to stereotyping and suspicion' (p. 104).

The Malays, in the contexts of modernisation and economic development in Malaysia, are part of the newly-expanding middle and upper classes in the modern urban sectors following the implementation of the New Economic Policy. The government-'sponsored' upward mobility among the Malays in Malaysia could produce such a satisfying 'class mobility' effect among them. This may reduce their sense of being a disadvantaged group, and promote more tolerable and less

antagonistic attitudes towards the non-Malays and their problems. In general, more sympathetic, favourable and less antagonistic attitudes between ethnic groups are expected to increase with the increase in their class positions, or with upward class mobility. Our main objective here is to explore the likelihood of the subjects' economic class backgrounds influencing their ethnic attitudes concerning the social and political issues and problems that we have discussed above.

There is a major obstacle in using the subjects' own occupational backgrounds for the above analysis. Most of the Malay and Chinese subjects in this study come from the general services group, comprising general office administrators, clerks, technicians, teachers and nurses. This group forms about 80% of the subjects. The other occupational groups are small in number. This does not permit us to explore the differences by class in the social and political attitudes. On the other hand, all the subjects in this study are at the moment pursuing their university degree courses. There is a high possibility that their present occupational position may change for the better in the future. Because they are still in the transitional phase, it will be difficult for us to think of any really strong class related consciousness or interests among them, or to effect their social and political attitudes. But we can examine their parents' occupational backgrounds. It is likely that the parents' occupational backgrounds play an important role as an influence on their children's attitudes. The parents' occupation, especially for the

immediate generation, can in fact be considered as a part of the subjects' own continuing social background, as most of them retain close contact with their parents and their other related social surroundings. In this respect, the attitudes of the subjects who are students are most likely to be influenced by their estimation of the social advantages and disadvantages in relation to the class position of their parents.

The occupational backgrounds of the Malay subjects derived from their parents' occupation is shown in Table 7.8(a). The distribution of the subjects in occupational groups is more dispersed than the distribution based on the respondents' own occupations. This, however, is only true notably between occupational groups one (47%) and three (34%). The representation of the subjects in occupational groups two, four and five is still small. This very low frequency limits the basis for generalising and understanding the influences of socio-economic classes.

In the analysis, we have collapsed the occupational categories as shown in Table 7.8(b). The same strategy was used to redistribute the Chinese subjects. Table 7.9(a,b) shows the distribution of the Chinese subjects in various occupational backgrounds and levels based on their parents' occupations. In the following analysis, the term 'occupational background or level' refers to that of the subjects' parents.

Table 7.8: The Distribution of The Malay Subjects, by Parents' Occupational Background and Level (%)

a. Occupational Group	Total
1. Fisherman, trishaw peddler, small farmer, odd job worker, petty trader	47% (76)
2. Manual worker, factory worker, sales assistant	9% (14)
3. General services worker, general office administrator, technician, teacher, nurses	34% (55)
4. Businessman, merchant, wholesaler	7% (12)
5. Executives and professional in the private and government sectors	1% (3)
b. Occupational Levels	
1. Lower (1,2)	90 (56%)
2. Middle (3)	55 (34%)
3. Upper (4,5)	15 (10%)

Table 7.9: The Distribution of The Chinese Subjects, by Parents' Occupational Background and Level (%)

a. Occupational Group	Total
1. Fisherman, trishaw peddler, small farmer, odd job worker, petty trader	36% (55)
2. Manual worker, factory worker, sales assistant	28% (44)
3. General services worker, general office administrator, technician, teacher, nurses	22% (34)
4. Businessman, merchant, wholesaler	12 % (20)
5. Executives and professional in the private and government sectors	1% (1)
b. Occupational Levels	
1. Lower (1,2)	99 (64%)
2. Middle (3)	34 (22%)
3. Upper (4,5)	21 (14%)

Responses to the Statement Questions

The Malay subjects did not show any significant difference by occupational backgrounds in their responses to various issues raised by the statement questions (Table 7.10). All the groups have expressed their strong support on standing for national anthem, issues of dependency on government programmes, emigration of dissatisfied Malaysians, Malaysia for all Malaysians and the advantages of a multiethnic society. They strongly expressed disagreement on the issue of racial discrimination while on the issue of Indonesian migrants they are divided in their attitude. The subjects from the middle and upper occupational backgrounds still maintain the same attitudes as those from a lower occupational background on all the key ethnic issues.

The data does not show any tendency to support that favourable attitudes with regards to ethnic relations will become prominent with the improvement in occupational backgrounds. Although the favourable attitude on the issue of racial discrimination seems to be greater among the subjects of the middle occupational background (20%), the higher percentage is not consistent with the attitude showed by the subjects from the upper occupational background (14%). On the issue of emigration of dissatisfied Malaysians, an unfavourable attitude was indicated among subjects from higher occupational background. A similar tendency also occurs in perceiving the advantages of a multiethnic society. The subjects from the middle

occupational background also show more inclination to reject the idea that Malaysia is for all Malaysians.

Table 7.10: The Malay Subjects' Responses to Statements Questions, by Parents' Occupational Levels (%)

Issues		Lower	Middle	Upper
1. Standing for National Anthem				
	Agree	94	90	87
	Disagree	5	6	0
2. Racial Discrimination				
	Agree	12	20	14
	Disagree	87	74	80
3. Dependency on Government				
	Agree	80	80	93
	Disagree	20	16	7
4. Indonesian Migrants				
	Agree	55	46	47
	Disagree	42	53	47
5. Emigration of Dissatisfied				
	Agree	70	75	80
	Disagree	27	20	20
6. Malaysia for All Malaysians				
	Agree	92	84	93
	Disagree	8	14	7
7. Advantageous of Multiethnic				
	Agree	83	74	80
	Disagree	16	19	20

The responses from the Chinese subjects, too, do not indicate any significant influence of the occupational backgrounds on their social and political attitudes (Table 7.11). Subjects from all the occupational backgrounds maintain similar patterns of attitudes. They have expressed strong agreement on standing for national anthem, dependency on government programmes, Malaysia for all Malaysians and advantages of a multiethnic society. They are more inclined to disagree with the emigration of dissatisfied Malaysians

and showed a divided attitude on the issue of racial discrimination. No favourable effects were reflected consistently on the important key ethnic issues with an increase in the occupational backgrounds.

Table 7.11: The Chinese Subjects' Responses to Statements Questions, by Parents' Occupational Levels (%)

Issues		Lower	Middle	Upper
1. Standing for National Anthem				
	Agree	94	94	95
	Disagree	4	3	0
2. Racial Discrimination				
	Agree	53	50	43
	Disagree	45	50	43
3. Dependency on Government				
	Agree	82	85	81
	Disagree	17	15	14
4. Indonesian Migrants				
	Agree	49	59	57
	Disagree	48	38	38
5. Emigration of Dissatisfied				
	Agree	32	38	33
	Disagree	58	59	53
6. Malaysia for All Malaysians				
	Agree	98	97	100
	Disagree	2	3	0
7. Advantageous of Multiethnic				
	Agree	91	79	95
	Disagree	8	15	5

Rating on National Problems

In general, the Malay subjects from all occupational backgrounds showed a greater similarity in their rating of urgency, or importance of the different national problems (Table 7.12). Drug addiction and corruption are the two most highly rated social problems throughout. The problems that fall second in priority are political disunity, poverty and

ethnic differences. Only a small variation in emphasis on most of the problems listed was found among the subjects of different occupational backgrounds.

Table 7.12:
Percentage of the Malay Subjects who believe this is a National Problem, by Occupational Levels

	Lower	Middle	Upper
Corruption	47	49	40
Religious Deviation	4	13	0
Poverty	34	31	20
Drug Addiction	61	64	60
Political Disunity	33	40	40
Unequal Access to Education	6	5	7
Ethnic Differences	24	29	40

The most significant difference between the classes among the Malays is the 'upper class' group, which is more conscious of ethnic differences. Being the most 'satisfied' group, they did not reflect favourably by being less concerned with ethnic differences. In fact, the Malays' awareness of ethnic differences has steadily increased with an improvement in their class backgrounds, that is 24% among the 'lower class', 29% among the 'middle class' and 40% among the 'upper class' groups.

The rating on the various national problems among the Chinese, also did not vary in relation to their differences in occupational backgrounds (Table 7.13). Subjects from the middle occupational background rated unequal access to education and ethnic differences as much more serious problems compared to other groups. As these are the most

crucial in the field of ethnic relations, the increase in their concern indicates unfavourable attitudes from the 'middle class' group, although no further increases were noticed among the 'upper class' group.

Table 7.13:
Percentage of the Chinese Subjects who believe this is a National Problem, by Occupational Levels

	Lower	Middle	Upper
Corruption	66	76	52
Religious Deviation	10	18	5
Poverty	31	26	19
Drug Addiction	60	65	38
Political Disunity	23	21	10
Unequal Access to Education	49	62	38
Ethnic Differences	37	59	38

Rating on Ethnic Relations

Different occupational backgrounds did not produce any significant variations in the Malay subjects' opinion concerning prevailing ethnic relations in Malaysia today (Table 7.14). Subjects from all the occupational backgrounds were strongly divided in their opinions. Favourable positive attitudes among the middle and upper class groups (45% and 53% respectively) were not much higher than the 51% among the lower class group.

Among the Chinese subjects, as high as 62% of the upper class group showed an optimistic attitude towards the quality of ethnic relations in Malaysia as compared to 47% among the lower class group (Table 7.15). But again, the increase is not consistent with the opinion expressed by the

middle class group. Only 38% of them expressed a positive view on the prevailing ethnic relations in Malaysia.

Table 7.14: Ethnic Relations in Malaysia, by Parents' Occupational Level among Malays (%)

	Lower	Middle	Upper
Good	51	45	53
Moderate	49	55	47
Bad	0	0	0
	100	100	100

Table 7.15: Ethnic Relations in Malaysia, by Parents' Occupational Level among Chinese (%)

	Lower	Middle	Upper
Good	47	38	62
Moderate	53	59	38
Bad	0	3	0
	100	100	100

Discussion and Conclusion

The data analysis in this chapter aims at exploring the relationship between some of the social and political attitudes of the subjects and the measures of modernisation, in particular, the measures of interethnic contact exposures and occupational backgrounds. We are looking at the way in which different groups of Malay and Chinese subjects with different levels of interethnic contact exposures and occupational backgrounds expressed their attitudes concerning some of the social and political issues in Malaysia. The main aim in presenting this analysis is to see whether or not there is any ground for believing that

'modernisation' in Malaysia has brought together some sections of people belonging to different ethnic groups to share similar social and political attitudes across their ethnic boundaries. Secondly to see whether or not economic class differences could be accounted for any variation in their ethnic attitudes. Now in this section, we will discuss the implications of the findings to the argument of the contact hypothesis, which predicts a greater flexibility in interethnic attitudes as a result of modernisation, in particular, through extensive interethnic contacts.

In the beginning of this chapter, we discussed why the present observations are especially important in the case of the Malaysian society. To study the effects of modernisation on ethnic relations, especially on the ethnic attitudes in Malaysia, one would obviously have to give more attention to the effects of modernisation on the attitudes of the Malays specifically. This is because the latter are as we have said the main target group in the governments' strategies for modernisation in Malaysia. Governmental policies such as the education and economic programmes were implemented with the aim of integrating the Malay population into the main stream of modern economy and occupational structures, and urban living. The main theme, or assumption, that underlines the implementation of the New Economic Policy since 1970 is that modernisation of the Malays will produce a more integrated Malaysian society.

Now let us turn to the results of the above data analysis and try to understand its implications for the argument of the modernisation theory. The results of the Malay's answers show the following findings:

(1) Differences in interethnic contact exposures and occupational backgrounds among the Malay subjects did not invoke significant variations in their attitudes. Their attitudes in relation to these factors show:

(a) Wide and strong support on standing for national anthem.

(b) Wide and strong rejection of the view that racial discrimination is worse in Malaysia than in any other country.

(c) Wide agreement, however not strongly, supporting the view that the government's programmes will eventually destroy people's ability to look after themselves.

(d) A rather divided attitude, but with a strong opposing view, about the Indonesian immigrants as socially undesirable people in Malaysia.

(e) Wide support for emigration of dissatisfied Malaysians.

(f) Wide agreement but not always 'strong agreement', on seeing Malaysia as a country for all Malaysians and not just for the Malays.

(g) Wide agreement but not always 'strongly', about the advantage of the multiethnic feature of Malaysian society.

(h) A common pattern of rating on national problems. To a large degree, top priority goes to drug addiction and corruption, second to poverty, political disunity and ethnic differences, and third to unequal access to education and religious deviation.

(i) That to a large extent, the description of the condition of ethnic relations in Malaysia today is rather divided. While no one likes to describe it as in a bad state, neither does a majority want to express it with full confidence. The positive view also tends to decline with the increase in interethnic contact exposure.

(2) Among the Chinese subjects too, their differences in interethnic contact exposure and occupational backgrounds did not cause significant changes in their attitudes. Their attitudes in relation to these factors show:

(a) Wide support on standing for national anthem. But their strong support tends to decline among subjects of middle and upper occupational backgrounds.

(b) A rather divided, but not always 'strongly', in endorsing racial discriminations as worse in Malaysia than any other country.

(c) Wide agreement, but not always 'strongly', in seeing the government's programmes as destroying people's ability to help themselves.

(d) A rather divided, although often 'strongly' expressed view in favour of rejecting the Indonesian immigrants as socially undesirable.

(e) Wide disapproval and often 'strongly', on the emigration of dissatisfied Malaysians.

(f) Strong resolved attitude, if not complete agreement, on endorsing that Malaysia is a country for all Malaysians and not just for the Malays.

(g) Wide agreement on the advantage of the multiethnic feature of Malaysian society. The confidence is much stronger among subjects of the middle and upper occupational backgrounds. The confidence, however, tends to decline among the subjects of high interethnic contact exposure.

(h) A common pattern of rating on national problems. Top priority goes to corruption and drug addiction. Second priority to ethnic differences and unequal access to education, and the third to political disunity and religious deviation.

(i) A rather divided view when assessing the quality of ethnic relations in Malaysia today. The positive view was not expressed with a clear majority by any group of subjects, except among the subjects of upper occupational background who see it with greater confidence.

There are several instances where some differences exist between groups with different interethnic contact experiences and occupational backgrounds. We will discuss these variations in relation to the possible effects of 'modernisation' and economic class differences on Malaysian ethnicity later.

Our assumption in this present chapter is more tolerant attitudes could be formed among those most 'favourably' effected by modernisation. This can be expected to occur among the group with greater inter-ethnic exposure. Also, as some may suspect, the upper and middle occupational groups in Malaysia are less likely to express intolerant, pro-ethnic attitudes than the lower occupational group because of their greater westernised life styles and opportunities for inter-group contact. Groups with a relatively higher intergroup contact experience and who enjoy better occupational status, quality of life and westernised life styles are more likely to stress values and perspectives incompatible with ethnocentric attitudes and formal discriminatory policies and practices. The 'modernised' Malays are the most important group whose views are to be explored because of the rapid modernisation processes that they are undergoing since the last two decades. But we are also interested in looking at the way in which the Chinese who possess similar attributes of modernisation would respond to the important key ethnic issues and problems.

Although in some respects both the Chinese and Malays may share common beliefs and attitudes, the findings in general, did not render, if any, a clear support to the weakening of the importance of ethnicity in Malaysia. Chinese and Malays from all the different 'contact' and 'class' groups have consistently expressed different attitudes to certain key issues. More importantly, the results did not support the speculation that 'modernisation' and economic development has induced more flexible, universal and tolerable ethnic attitudes among certain quarters of the ethnic groups who are exposed to greater interethnic contact.

As we already know from Chapter Six, the Malays and Chinese did express common attitudes through their views and concerns, but not in all the issues forwarded to them. The present analysis shows that these common attitudes to a large extent prevail throughout all the groups among the Malay and Chinese subjects regardless of their differences in the exposure of interethnic contacts and parents' occupational backgrounds.

There are three issues on the statement questions to which both the Malay and Chinese subjects consistently showed greater agreement in their responses. These are issues concerning standing for national anthem, dependency on government programmes and the feeling about the Indonesian immigrants. These issues, as argued in chapter six, are not sufficiently ethnically sensitive matters to expect diverse

responses from the different groups of Chinese and Malay subjects.

On the other hand, in some other matters which are politically sensitive to the relations between the Malays and the non-Malays, the Chinese and Malay subjects did not show attitudes that were consistent with the desirable effect of modernisation. The Chinese and Malay subjects with a higher interethnic contact exposure by and large do not indicate that they are alike in their attitudes, nor are they willing to demonstrate attitudes of tolerance and understanding towards each other, or express an optimistic view about ethnic relations and society in general.

Firstly, higher interethnic contact exposure among the subjects fails to produce common non-hostile and sympathetic attitudes among the Chinese and the Malays concerning the issue of racial discrimination. Ethnic contact does not seem to have either reduced the Chinese' antagonistic view towards the government's policy to help the Malays, or to change the Malays opinion about accepting such a policy, at least in principle, as discriminatory or unfair to others. For the Chinese to deny the policy as a discriminatory would mean that they have accepted the importance of the Government's pro-Malay economic policy, and more importantly, they are willing to identify and be sympathetic to the Malays' needs and frustrations as a disadvantaged group. On the other hand, for the Malays to view such a policy as one of racial discrimination would mean that they

are sympathetic with the non-Malays' feeling of injustice, frustration and concern about the adverse effect of such a policy on the non-Malays. Modernisation through greater contact between ethnic groups should diminish the antagonistic and conflicting views of the Malays and Chinese regarding the issue of racial discrimination. Instead, both groups of subjects with higher interethnic contact have expressed their contradicting attitudes, consistent with the attitudes expressed by the group with less contact. The Malays' rejection and the Chinese' approval of the notion that racial discrimination is high in Malaysia was widely shared within their own groups regardless of their members' differences in the level of interethnic contact exposures and occupational backgrounds.

Secondly, the absence of difference by social contact again became evident with regards to the issue of emigration of dissatisfied Malaysians. The issue of emigration of dissatisfied Malaysians, as we have indicated in chapter 6, specifically refers to the emigration of the non-Malays who are not content with the government's ethnic preferential policy (Means, 1991: 135). To this, higher interethnic contact exposure among the Malays does not invoke greater understanding of the non-Malays' frustration and its reason. It did not stop them from showing openly that the non-Malays should emigrate to some other country if they are not happy with the governmental policy of helping the Malays, or of promoting Malay culture. This clearly does not accept as legitimate the non-Malays' opposition to the Government's

pro-Malay policies. Although the contemporary Malays may experience greater interethnic contact in an urban neighbourhood, they did not think that the non-Malays' right to stay in Malaysia was unconditional. We need not forget how the Malays in Kuala Lumpur in the 1969 riot reacted immediately and forcefully to the Chinese' opposition and celebration of 'victory' in the elections. Despite residential proximity, 'modernisation' did not promote a wider cohesive polyethnic community feeling and understanding.

Although the Chinese have responded differently from the Malays, their rejection of the idea of emigration again cannot be associated with the desirable effect of modernisation, except to view it also as an expression of opposition to the Malays, i.e. their fundamental rights to stay as well as to express their dissatisfaction towards the governmental pro-Malay policies. This is evident when we take into consideration the Chinese subjects' expression of the very same attitude throughout all their different groups regardless of differences in interethnic contact exposure and occupational backgrounds. It is not exclusively the view of the Chinese of higher interethnic contact exposure. This same interpretation of Chinese response should also apply in other cases where all the Chinese groups have answered differently from that of the Malays.

Thirdly, both the Chinese and Malays, despite their higher interethnic contact backgrounds, did not express outrightly

their positive or optimistic view about their relations with others, or about the advantage of living together in a multiethnic society like Malaysia. In addition the Malays, in particular, do not seem to have full confidence in appreciating the value of the multiethnic feature of Malaysian society.

Fourthly, especially among the Malays, despite their higher degree of interethnic mixing, they have not really opened their minds to the idea of equal rights among all Malaysians. While like others they may have generally accepted the idea that Malaysia belongs to all her citizens, they could not commit themselves strongly to the principle of equality of citizenship, or more importantly, deny their deep-rooted feelings that Malaysia basically belongs to the Malays. This kind of narrow ethnic perspective again seems to continue to restrain them from being more universalistic in their view of the national problems. Their wider interethnic contact exposure does not seem to have led them to disregard their own 'ethnic perspective'. They do not feel strongly the desire to share, or acknowledge the problems of others as equally serious national problems. For example, they never regarded the non-Malays' problem, especially the one that has arisen from the government's ethnic preferential policy, such as unequal access to education, or to scholarships, as worthy of serious consideration as national problems. This again reflects that 'modernisation' through wider contact has failed to create

wider universalistic attitudes, or consciousness of the polyethnic community.

In all the above examples, the Malays' and Chinese' attitudes were expressed in a very consistent pattern throughout all the internal groups among the Malay and Chinese subjects. Within the Malay and Chinese groups, their internal differences in the interethnic contact exposure and occupational backgrounds did not cause any meaningful variation in their attitudes. To put it differently, we do not have any substantial evidence from this study to argue that greater interethnic contact exposure has produced flexible, tolerant and universalistic attitudes among the Malays and Chinese in politically important issues.

There are, however, a few instances where small variations in the responses were expressed among the subjects who are experiencing a relatively higher degree of 'modernisation', i.e. higher interethnic contact exposure. Some of these differences which are contrary to the argument of 'modernisation', tend to give an impression that the greater the contact, the greater may be the people's awareness of their conflict and ethnic differences. These small variations, however, should not be overstated. But these findings are consistent with the general argument which sees an increase in ethnic group awareness and conflict as a consequence of direct and greater contact and competition for material and social interests between ethnic

groups. It is worth taking note of this possible evidence with some degree of caution.

The Chinese and Malay direct and continuous contact in the highly competitive social, economic and political circumstances in urban centres, could have produced more negative, pessimistic and hostile attitudes rather than positive, optimistic and tolerant attitudes among these groups. The disadvantaged or imbalanced relationships in the social lives, economics and politics between them could have possibly created more frustrations, dissatisfactions and counter-reactions especially in the middle and upper social classes of the Chinese and Malays. Among the small variations that may indicate this counter development to that of contact argument are:

a) more middle and upper class Malays are less concerned about dissatisfied Malaysians (non-Malays) leaving Malaysia;

b) fewer upper and middle class Malays show universal attitudes to admit Malaysia belongs to all Malaysians, or feel strongly about it;

c) more upper class Malays are aware of the ethnic differences as a national problem;

d) Malays with higher interethnic contact feel strongly about Malaysia belonging just to the Malays. They also supported emigration of dissatisfied Malaysians and showed less confidence in the prevailing ethnic relations;

e) more middle class Chinese are aware of the unequal access to education and ethnic differences as serious national problems.

A few additional cross-tabulations of variables were also carried out to see whether there is any indication of

relationship between these measures of modernisation and the subjects' responses to the hypothetical questions on Tan Seng Seng that we observed in chapters 4 and 5. We are aware that in these hypothetical questions we are not measuring the subjects' own ethnic preferential actions, or attitudes *per se*. But it is plausible to suspect that the subjects' own experience, or attitude may play an important role in deciding how they predict the other person will make a choice. In other words, we are being suspicious of the relationship between the subjects' prediction of ethnic preference choice and their own different experiences in the interethnic contact exposure and occupational background.

For the above purpose, three hypothetical questions in which more than 50% of the Chinese and Malay subjects made ethnic preference choices were explored. These were child adoption, mixed marriage and the zoo trip. The findings again did not produce any significant different results to believe that 'modernisation' in Malaysia has drastically reduced the importance of ethnicity (Table 7.16 & 7.17). The ethnic preference choices were still given priority among all the different groups of the Chinese and Malay subjects. The subjects with greater interethnic contact exposure, both during their childhood and currently, and those who have moved to mixed ethnic neighbourhoods in their adulthood, as the results show, are still strongly influenced by their ethnic preference. Similarly, there is also no ground to believe that their ethnic preference will be influenced by

their economic class backgrounds, although there may be small variations in their responses.

Table 7.16: Ethnic Preference Choice, by Interethnic Contact Exposure and Ethnic Group (%)

	Chinese		Malay	
	EE	MM	EE	EM
Zoo Trip	73	64	54	64
Child Adoption	80	79	74	65
Mix Marriage	69	64	80	81

Table 7.17: Ethnic Preference Choice, by Occupational Backgrounds and Ethnic Group (%)

	Chinese			Malay		
	Low	Mid	Upp	Low	Mid	Upp
Zoo Trip	68	56	76	63	46	66
Child Adoption	84	79	86	73	62	73
Mix Marriage	65	79	76	85	71	80

The observations made in this chapter reveal that views, concerns and priorities expressed by the Chinese and Malay subjects were to a large extent widely shared within each group regardless of their differences in their degree of exposure to modernisation. Among the Malays and Chinese, 'modernisation', i.e interethnic contact exposure and higher class situations, does not appear to be an influential factor in reducing the disparity in their attitudes concerning politically important ethnic issues and problems. These issues and problems that have developed around the issues of Malay power, privileges and ethnic preferential policies seem to mobilise strongly the Malaysian ethnicity and sustain ethnic conflict. Malay and Chinese attitudes are

still very much a mirror of an antagonistic, intolerant, non-accomodating kind of ethnic attitudes and disregard for each others' aspirations and problems. These attitudes and the act of ethnic preference continue to persist among the 'modern' Malays and Chinese in Malaysia. The present observations do not indicate that 'modernisation' in Malaysia has brought considerable flexibility in the political attitudes and behaviour that are ethnically defined among the Malays and Chinese. The present results reveal great disparity with most of the findings we obtained from the ethnic preference tests in the hypothetical cases in which the majority of the cases tested were trivial and not ethnically sensitive social matters of interactions at the personal level.

Chapter 8

ETHNIC PREFERENCE, STRUCTURES AND ETHNICITY IN MALAYSIA

On reaching this concluding chapter, we need to address critically the major objective of this study. In this study we attempt to assess the salience of ethnic preference in relation to Chinese ethnic alignment in Malaysian society. We also need to address two further questions: one is to assess the suitability of the individualistic approach in studying ethnic loyalties, and the second is to ask how far we can go in generalising from this study to the whole structure of ethnic relations in Malaysia.

The basis of the study was the survey of Malay and Chinese respondents, in which they were asked how in their view a representative Chinese person would express his ethnic preferences relative to other interests. These interests were presented as conflicting values in different hypothetical social situations which the ethnic representative may possibly face in his everyday interactions with members of other ethnic groups in Malaysia.

One conspicuous conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that although the Chinese in Malaysia do not appear to express attitudes of a kind overtly consistent with 'blind' ethnic loyalty, there is no reason for us to believe that the importance people attach to their ethnicity is weakening in Malaysia. This conclusion is derived from the Chinese

subjects' perception of the behaviour or action of their own ethnic representative in various hypothetical social situations where ethnic interest is presumed to come into conflict with other interests, in particular, self-interest of material and status kinds and personal obligations. In most circumstances, the Malay subjects' estimation of Chinese ethnic preference also does not differ very much from that of the Chinese themselves.

The finding is consistent, in some respects, with Mansor's earlier study (1992) on the strength of Malay ethnic alignment. This is true, at least as far as the statistical pattern is concerned in most of the cases observed. The comparison of the percentage of subjects who made ethnic preference choices from both the studies is presented in table 8.1. Mansor has interpreted his findings as showing a relative weakness of Malay ethnic loyalty. It may not be as conclusive as he believed it to be.

In seven out of the twelve observations in Mansor's study, the ethnic preferences are in fact much higher than the present study's observation. In two cases (shopping choice, renting out house) the differences are very marked. Mansor may have been convinced by the fact that in 10 out of the 12 cases no more than two-thirds of the subjects do believe in the influence of ethnic preference. Only in the case of shopping choice does the percentage comes a little closer to 50%. In 7 cases only less than one-third express their belief in the possibility of such an influence. According to

Mansor these findings showed the weakening of Malay ethnicity, as well as ethnicity in general in Malaysia. He argued that this weakening is due to the effects of modernisation and economic development in the society that allow universalistic norms (self-interests and personal obligations) to take a strong hold in reducing the significance of ethnic alignment (1992: 180- 197).

Table 8.1: Percentage of Subjects Making Ethnic Preference Choices: Comparison with Mansor's Study

	Social Circumstances	Present[a] study	Mansor's[b] study
1.	Shopping Choice	14	47
2.	Renting Out House	4	31
3.	Child Minding	17	23
4.	House Key	1	0
5.	Child Adoption	82	67
6.	Zoo Trip	66	74
7.	Wedding Invitation	34	27
8.	Bringing a Friend Home	1	6
9.	Child's Playmate	9	14
10.	Wedding Party	0	18
11.	Supporting Boss	25	20
12.	Mixed Marriage	69	28

a - Chinese ethnic preference according to the Chinese subjects' estimation
b - Malay ethnic preference according to the Malay subjects' estimation

A similar pattern of results seems to recur in 9 out of 12 cases in the present survey. If we use the similar two-thirds, or more than 50% percentage criteria, then the results of the present study may also give an impression that the Chinese in Malaysia act in a manner less consistent with the notion of ethnic preference. By Mansor's standard, people of different ethnic groups in Malaysia will act in a manner less consistent with the notion of ethnic sentiment,

or that ethnic identities and loyalties are applied and enacted with considerable flexibility.

The present study is a replication of Mansor's study and in some respects has resulted, as the above table shows, in similar findings. But on analysis we must question the way in which Mansor proceeds from his survey of attitudes expressed by his respondents to a more general set of conclusions about the sharpness, or otherwise, of ethnic conflict in Malaysia. For Mansor, in doing so, ignores some important potential errors. He may underestimate the difficulties involved in the interpretation of his own data. This is particularly evident in advancing possible reasons for the judgements which respondents make.

Firstly, in data of this kind, we simply do not know with certainty why respondents make their choices. We know only the choices which they record. Secondly, the social situations investigated are hypothetical. So a Malay person may well say that, given a particular situation, he may make a universalistic choice. But in practice this situation may rarely, if ever, present itself. Daily life may reinforce ethnic sentiments even if in theory it could be broken. Thirdly, even if we take the responses more or less at face value, to extrapolate from them to the generality of ethnic relations in Malaysia constitutes a failure to recognise the levels at which ethnic conflict may exist. A typical Malay may say 'Yes, under certain circumstances I would shop at a Chinese shop (even in preference to a Malay shop). But

politically I don't trust them'. Likewise the typical Chinese may also say 'Yes, I would attend my Malay friend's wedding. But politically I don't agree with the Malays' special constitutional privileges'.

The following discussion will show that not only uncertainty can arise from such interpretations, but there are also sound reasons to believe that ethnicity, ethnic identity and ethnic conflict are still very much an influential force in Malaysian society. It is however important to see first how Mansor has argued in opposing the majority of previous observations to uphold his optimistic view about ethnic relations in Malaysia.

Mansor's Optimistic Views

In looking at the implications of the findings, we may ask what the results of both the present and Mansor's studies can disclose about ethnic relations or ethnic conflict in Malaysia. At a 'face-value' interpretation, the findings seem to indicate that there now prevails in Malaysia more flexible ethnic relations among the different ethnic groups. The Chinese and Malays, for example, as indicated in both the studies, do not seem to be strongly influenced by their sense of ethnic attachment which otherwise could possibly hinder, minimise or polarise ethnic relations with one another or vice-versa; for ethnic attachment is both cause and effect. Their willingness to give priority to other interests, in particular to the self-interest of material

and status kinds, and personal obligation over their ethnic preference appear to indicate that they are now more willing to act voluntarily in a manner that may undermine any form of ethnic prejudice that might go hand in hand with their strong urge for ethnic preference, attachment, alignment, or chauvinism.

The other interests that are tested against ethnic interests seem to have exerted a greater influence for the Chinese and Malays to forge interactions that are free from ethnic prejudice, suspicion and consideration, or simply create better interethnic relations across the ethnic boundaries in society. Malaysians of Malay and Chinese origin seem to have acted 'rationally' in many social circumstances to make non-ethnic instead of ethnic preference choices as an optimizing act through the daily course of their lives. But we do not know for certain whether this is what the result actually implies, especially when acting 'rationally' is equated with not acting out of 'blind' ethnic loyalty. For example, choosing to patronise a shop belonging to a co-ethnic member instead of the other ethnic shop, which is much lower in price, may still be a rational choice. It cannot be interpreted as irrational 'blind' ethnic loyalty if a person has, for example, carefully calculated the benefit of his own cultural choices, or the flexible credit purchase he or she may obtain from his own ethnic shop.

From Mansor's point of view, the real problem in the society is, however, that of *pluralistic ignorance*, a term

introduced by Allport (1924). Researchers have used the concept to describe the misjudgement of the members of one group about their own, or the attitudes and behaviour of other racial or ethnic groups (Banton, 1986; Fields & Schuman, 1976; O'Gorman, 1976; Hewstone & Ward, 1985). Mansor believes,

> *The data collected on pluralistic ignorance demonstrated that a sociologist who collects such data has a source of information superior to that of the people going about their daily lives. Malaysians' images of their society and its ethnic relations, even if widely shared, failed to correspond with the facts collected'. The findings on the problems of pluralistic ignorance indicate that the whole Malay group in Petaling Jaya, be it in terms of gender or age, is more sympathetic towards universalist norms than individuals of the group (Malay) realise* (1992: 185).

He further comments that the inaccurate picture of pluralistic ignorance about ethnic relations in a society like Malaysia is due to the strong influence of Furnivall's images of conflict, and a highly divided plural society among the scholars studying race and ethnic relations (1992: 186). Yet Mansor has failed to realise here that in most of the social circumstances he studied, the Chinese actually have *under*estimated Malay ethnic influence. This kind of pluralistic ignorance after all cannot be said to be 'good news' for the Chinese, since the Malays are not as universalistic as the Chinese have thought them to be. Pluralistic ignorance, if at all, is the real problem in Malaysia, then it should indicate that the Malays are in fact more open, liberal and tolerant in their attitudes, than the Chinese have estimated.

Mansor is correct in commenting that the differences portrayed in the images of society and ethnic relations lie in the kinds of social relations analysed. He says, '... *in a changing society, there are situations where individuals are governed partly by universalistic and partly by ethnic norms.... The images of polarisation and the dominance of ethnicity in the Malay-Chinese relations emerged from group competition over the benefit of economic growth*' (p. 184). Although Mansor seems to recognise that different kinds, or different levels, of ethnic relations and conflicts might be involved in the analysis, he seems to over-generalise the implication of his findings without further exploring these different levels of ethnicity in Malaysia. It is rather absurd to think that the Malay-Chinese competition over the benefit of economic growth has disappeared in the society, or to think that the ethnic preferential New Economic Policy is not a controversial, or sensitive issue in Malaysian ethnic relations. Yet Mansor goes on to generalise:

> *...new relationships governed by universalistic rather than ethnic norms are being introduced into Malaysian society. Malays and Chinese are relating to one another in social relations that attribute little significance to ethnic sentiment and loyalty...The new relationships provide opportunities for Malays and Chinese to relate to one another as individual men and women, and in this way restrict the applicability of ethnic norms (p.180)....while people may be sensitive to ethnic considerations in certain circumstances,...large areas of their life come under the influence of non-ethnic norms. This changing social reality of Malay-Chinese relations has been brought about by individual actions and has weakened the concern for group boundaries* (p. 184).

He may intend to show that society is changing, and there are now more non-ethnic norms than before that have started

to weaken the ethnic boundaries, especially in urban settings. But he appears to neglect many other researchers' and scholars' views which indicate that ethnic conflict and ethnicity are very important features of Malaysian society. Instead, he continues by arguing against the observations of many other researchers and scholars (such as Basham, 1983; Milne, 1981; Mutalib, 1990; Jesudason, 1989; Lee, 1990; Snider, 1977; Ting, 1982; Von Vorys, 1975.) to make a kind of an over-emphasis on his findings.

Mansor has clearly indicated his preference for the 'bottom-up' approach which he employed in his study. He criticised sociologists for being more interested in large scale social trends in society rather than trying to explore the different processes involved in generating and maintaining ethnic groups (p. 196). He also criticised previous studies of ethnic relations in Malaysia for having concentrated more on Malay-Chinese differences, or conflicts. He believes that the method he employed in his study has revealed instead the Malay-Chinese similarities which have been overlooked before. He seems to be convinced by his description of how Malays and Chinese interact and participate in many social situations which he refers to as a 'non-ethnic universalist sphere'. He believes this to be a new trend in ethnic relations in Malaysia where Malaysians, according to him, have come to ignore their ethnic origin or sentiment in such situations.

While the present study may have produced a similar pattern of statistical findings, it offers an alternative view. This view instead will take into consideration developments in the wider socio-political system to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Malaysian ethnicity and ethnic relations in society. Before proceeding to look closely into the present findings, it is vital to assess critically the changes in the society that may have influenced the way people perceive progress made in ethnic relations in Malaysia.

Critical View of Changes in Ethnic Relations

In this section, we will look into some of the changes in Malaysian society critically, in particular the interethnic groups' experiences which provide reasons why we should be cautious in interpreting findings from limited observations like Mansor's as well as the present one. We cannot simply conclude from this kind of data that ethnic relations have improved in Malaysia, or that the importance of ethnicity has weakened. We cannot be persuaded by conclusions which appear to be partly driven by the wish to show the virtues of an individualistic approach.[1] In Malaysia we certainly have to examine the view of many other scholars who have concluded that ethnic loyalties and identifications continue to structure political, economic and social life with an underlying potential for persistent conflict. A question

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1 In his latest article (1994), Banton has elaborated Mansor's method to support the argument for 'methodological individualism' in the study of ethnicity.

which is wholly connected, but which may be treated as a separate issue, is the question of the circumstances in which these underlying tensions erupt into violence. The findings of both studies should not be over-emphasised as conditions reflecting an overall situation or all levels of interactions or social contexts in the society, but instead should be treated with caution.

There is no doubt that the interactions amongst the members of the different ethnic groups in Malaysia have increased since Independence. The evidence of this study itself shows that a high percentage of the Malay and Chinese are at present frequently engaged in interethnic contact (see tables 6.6 - 6.9). It is impossible to limit interethnic interactions from occurring in a society like Malaysia. Basically this is because their interactions are not controlled or regulated by any strict rules or laws such as those under the apartheid system in South Africa, and those of the slavery or post-slavery period in America. Even in these rigidly divided societies, some form of voluntary interaction between members of different ethnic groups is unavoidable. In Malaysia, during the British colonial era, there were very limited interethnic interactions, owing to compartmentalisation of ethnic groups in separate geographical areas and economic activities (see Chapter 1). In the situation of colonialism, structural segregations, cultural pluralism, and limited 'market place' interaction, as described by theorists of plural society (Furnivall, 1948; Smith, 1965), are features of the conditions of

interethnic interactions and relations in the Malaysian society during this era.

Keeping the Malays, Chinese and Indians apart, as we have discussed in chapter one, can be seen as a deliberate policy of colonial administration. It helps to manage the colonial multiethnic society much more easily, as well as keep under control any possibilities of anti-colonial struggle on the part of Malays and non-Malays. By keeping them working in different economic functions and living in geographically different areas, very minimal opportunities for interethnic interactions were provided under the colonial system, although ethnic groups were prevented from being thrown into direct conflict. But these separations have at the same time created some form of ethnic suspicion, cultural prejudice and stereotyped images and social distance in this early period among these peoples of different cultural backgrounds. The colonial British pro-Malay policy has too directly intensified these internal divisions and conflicts among the people. This was apparent in the emergence of communal politics, nationalism and issues of citizenship among the Malays and non-Malays in the country. Lack of interethnic interaction and integration are the main features of colonial Malaysian society. Relations between the Malays and the Chinese later became deteriorated during the period of the Japanese Occupation and the Emergency, and in the struggle over the Constitution since the 1940s.

Since Independence, the creation of new opportunities for greater interethnic interactions in various sectors and areas has increased as a consequence of industrialization, urbanization and rural-urban migration. As the Government has fostered the growth of industries in urban centres, it has also aimed to increase Malays' participation and their wealth in the modern economic and occupational sectors. The expansion of educational and training opportunities, and the creation of wider job markets, especially via the New Economic Policy, has encouraged rapid rural-urban migration of the Malays and has consequently increased the Malay population in cities and towns in Malaysia (see chapter 1). These have not only provided opportunities for interethnic contact and familiarity, but have also provided possibilities for the creation of new norms, values and interests as a basis for interaction between peoples that could have broken some of the traditional ethnic social barriers as well as prejudice and stereotyped thinking.

It cannot be denied that some people do tend to think that there has been an improvement in interethnic relations in Malaysia. For example, in this study, such opinions were indicated by more than 50% of the Malay and Chinese subjects (see tables 6.16 and 6.17). People do sometimes tend to associate the increase in the volume of interactions between groups with improvement in ethnic relations. The Malaysian government's aim of 'restructuring society' under the New Economic Policy is also partly based on the assumption that increase in the opportunities or frequencies

of social contact among different ethnic groups might well bring greater unity among the people.

There may be some truth in associating interaction with improvement in ethnic relations, especially when we compare it with the situations in some previous societies where interaction among different groups is rigidly divided by the law supporting ethnic, or racial discrimination. But on the other hand, interaction without integration or unity is also a possible situation in a society. What is equally, if not more, important is to understand the factors that may provoke and sustain potential interethnic conflict and the importance of ethnicity in a society from a higher political level. In other words, the interethnic conflict at a higher macro-level in society might prevail independently over that of the lower level everyday interactions. For example, Robin Williams, in his study (1964) of the interethnic interactions in United States, made interesting observations. He noted that while many interpersonal interactions may take place daily in a multiethnic society such as that of the United States, he comments,

> *...they (interpersonal interactions) may serve to bridge interethnic cleavages to some extent without having marked effects upon the basic structure of power within which ethnic categories have their life chance defined for them (p. 362)*

Social interaction does not only possibly create cooperation, sharing of new norms or unity, but it also creates new conditions for conflict in society. In fact, the very problem of self-awareness of ethnic identity among

members of different ethnic and racial groups in the modern world has resurged or intensified through the increase in social contact between them. The most isolated group of people is probably the least ethnically self-defined. As Fishman stressed,

> *Premodern ethnicity is, so far as the ordinary actor is concerned, minimally self-conscious. At best, it recognizes ethnic categories; ethnic blocs for the purposive, instrumental exploitation of ethnicity are unknown* (1977: 35).

This has openly challenged the prediction by Marxist and liberal scholars, as well as scholars of modernisation theories, of the collapse of ethnic identity or ideologies as modernisation and industrialisation become prominent features of society. It is believed that liberal democratic principles, i.e. equal rights citizenship and equal and fair treatment for all before the law, at least in principle, would deny the interference of ethnicity in the implementation of the above universal principles in modern democratic societies. But even in a highly democratic and modern society like the United States, ethnicity does not seem to have diminished, or followed the prophecy of the 'American melting-pot'. Eriksen (1993), in his comments on Glazer and Moynihan's study, stated,

> *They argued that rather than eradicating ethnic differences, modern American society has actually created a new form of self-awareness in people, which is expressed in a concern about roots and origins. Moreover, many American continue to use their ethnic networks actively when looking for jobs or a spouse. many prefer to live in neighbourhoods dominated by people with the same origins as themselves, and they continue to regard themselves as 'Italians', 'Poles' and so on in addition to being Americans - two generations or more after their ancestors left the country of origin (p. 8).*

Apart from comparing the situation with that in the colonial period, there may be other reasons for some people to see Malaysian's ethnic relations as a successful story. Firstly, the political stability that Malaysia enjoys, with only one major outbreak of ethnic violence in 1969, seems to support the notion of improvement in ethnic relations since Independence. For example, in comparison with Sri Lanka, Malaysia's success in encountering severe ethnic conflict, according to Horowitz (1989), is due to the incentives of the Malaysian political parties to seek votes across ethnic lines and to form an interethnic coalition party. The only major open ethnic violence that has come to be recorded in Malaysia's history since Independence is the May 13th riots in 1969. This event happened mainly in the area around the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. Fear of another outbreak of violence in 1987 was successfully allayed, but rather at the expense of 'demonstrated freedom'. After the 1969 incident, strategies for integration were implemented via the national language and education policy, national cultural policy, and most importantly, the New Economic Policy (see chapter 1). The political strategies include the formulation of a bigger coalition government under the National Front Party and the implementation of different acts to suppress ethnic politicking and extremists. All these policies and strategies since then have influenced the way in which people express, or suppress, their ethnicity, including the way people express their general opinion about the ethnic relations in Malaysia.

It is important to understand that there is a real tendency for people in Malaysia to be influenced by this ethnic violence of 1969 when they come to assess the present interethnic situation. With the May 13th incident in mind, present interethnic relations can create an impression that there is an improvement on the previous conditions. Politicians frequently remind citizens, Malay, Chinese, Indian and others, of the 1969 conflict. In effect, people are told: 'You never want that to happen again'. The very fear of a repetition produces a strong urge among politicians to spread the view that 'things are getting better'. Citizens themselves, of all ethnic origins, may retain their fears and suspicions but they cannot help being influenced by the kind of propaganda that denies the depth of ethnic suspicion. Although this may create reasons for 'compromise' or 'tolerance' among the Malaysians, they are not the product of modernisation.

Without other open ethnic clashes after the 1969 riots, ethnic relations, or 'integration' in Malaysia may outwardly appear to have improved. But this can be misleading. Ethnic relations cannot be judged as improved simply because there is no 'ongoing' open riot in the society. Open ethnic violence like that of May 13 is only one of the indicators, or more precisely, is only a consequence of ongoing ethnic conflict. Ethnic ill-feelings and resentment among people can continue to exist. These too determine the quality of ethnic relations in a society as well as reflecting a fragile polyethnic society. People also fear and do not

easily want to be drawn into a highly risky open ethnic violence. It also can be suppressed through various laws, as during the 1987 crisis. In Malaysia, the Internal Security Act and Sedition Act has been effectively used for this purpose, as well as for preventing people from publicly discussing any controversial issues that are sensitive to ethnic relations (see chapter 1).

Relations between ethnic groups tend to alter as a society changes, or progresses. World-wide experiences show that the nature of collective identity and relationships among ethnic groups can change, or take different forms. Ross, for example, sees communal, minority, ethnic and national groups as a progression of identity modes that manifests at different stages in accordance with changes in contact, and above all, by political changes in a society (Ross, 1979: 4-11). In the early stages of modern multiracial societies, for example during the period of slavery in the United States, the people were much more strictly divided or segregated spatially, culturally, socially and in some circumstances, legally. In such situations, racism has been a dominant social force that voluntarily or involuntarily influences the attitudes and behaviours of the members of social groups. Race relations and interactions between the Whites and the Blacks in this society were governed essentially by the law and, and also implemented by force. Any openly close and friendly social interaction, or mixed marriages in such situations were not expected to happen. But such interactions or unions would never be considered

unlawful, or even socially unexpected among the people of the current American society, although racial preference can still be a powerful influence.

In the same way, in the present Malaysian society, the experiences encountered by members of ethnic groups can no longer be perceived as strongly confined to the rigidity of their own ethnic boundaries. But neither can one ignore totally the influence of ethnic boundaries. The situation of ethnic relations in Malaysia cannot be assumed never to have changed at all since the colonial period. One cannot presume that the Malays have not yet completely accepted the Chinese as co-citizens of Malaysia, or that Malaysia belongs to all its citizens and not just to the Malays; that the Chinese will definitely join the Chinese Society in London because they do not consider themselves Malaysians yet; or that these Chinese will in fact want to go back to China because of their blood ties with their country of origin.[2] To be surprised if the above assumptions do not confirm the facts only means an unrealistic exaggeration of these situations. But at the same time, to use them as evidence of harmonious ethnic relations will also be equivalent to ignoring the salience of ethnicity and ethnic conflict that may exist or

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2 At one stage Mansor stressed how a Malay government servant was surprised with his findings but ... *reckoned that Chinese must be changing for them to accept the country's national symbols such as the national anthem, etc..., surprised that Malays in Petaling Jaya were observed to be changing and able to recognise that Malaysia is not just for Malays.... A Chinese friend told (him) that he was asked to join a Chinese society at a university in London, but refused to do so as he is a Malaysian. Another said he would not want to go back to Chinese mainland as there was no reason for him to do so. He had no blood ties there any more* (p. 194).

devolve from different levels on to the people. Responsible judgements therefore must also consider other possible influential factors. The power balance between ethnic groups at a wider political level is among the influential factors in Malaysian society. People may not necessarily or overtly refer to this macro-level ethnicity at micro-level interactions which mainly focused in specific interactional contexts.

In order to establish any meaningful conclusion about the strength of ethnic alignment, ethnic conflict or the importance of ethnicity in Malaysian society, one cannot merely concentrate on some aspects of cultural adaptations or universal norms that may have come to exist in the process of social changes in society. In the same way, we also cannot determine the situation based alone on evidence that shows a lack of strength or interest among people to express ethnic preference, loyalty, negative feelings, or racist attitudes 'blindly' or overtly towards other groups which otherwise would lead to continuous open conflict. It is no longer legitimate, or considered appropriate in the present context of modern democratic societies, for people to express their attitudes or support openly the act of discrimination and oppression, hostility, negative stereotypes, social distance and segregation. Racism is seen as an evil, inconsistent with the universalistic values of a truly democratic society. It is possible that Malaysian citizens are aware of this or are at least aware of the propaganda which tells them this. But the mere existence of

a developing market economy, a democratic political regime, and an ideology of universalism are not enough on their own to guarantee the disappearance or submergence of communalist sentiments.

If recent ethnic political conflicts in many societies can assist our discussion, one has to ask at least, why in a society like the former Yugoslavia, people of different ethnic origins and religious affiliations who used to engage in everyday interactions and dealings peacefully at the micro-level at one time, can now turn back and fight and kill one another, including neighbours and close friends, as a result of their ethno-religious political conflict? Even in a democratic, liberal and developed society like the United States of America, which eagerly prompted the idea of a melting-pot society and being the case study for the weakening of ethnicity in a highly modernised society, ethnicity, racial division and conflict do not appear to fade away. The cases of Rodney King and O.J. Simpson have not only indicated that American society too can be thrown into serious racial riots and tensions, but also the deep-rooted divisions and conflicts that persist among the people can be brought to the surface. In Europe too, racism, ethnicity and nationalism have disfigured the contemporary period of modern, democratic, liberal and affluent societies of the Western World (Rattansi and Westwood, 1994). The everyday scenario of micro-level interethnic interactions of these modern societies would hardly represent the underlying

political issues that may sustain racial and ethnic problems in these societies.

The 1969 riots in Kuala Lumpur itself did not happen because the Malays and the Chinese in Malaysia, or in the city, did not interact or engage in transactions peacefully through their daily course prior to the event. There was no report or anything written to indicate that this was the cause of the incident. The very reasons which prevailed at the wider societal level were economic and political . The Malays felt frustrated with their economically disadvantaged position compared with that of the Chinese, although they were granted special rights in the Constitution. As for the Chinese and Indians, they could not come to terms with the effects of Malay special rights and political hegemony. It was a politically frustrating experience for the non-Malays. The situation at the societal level was highly sensitive. The 1969 election was only the immediate circumstance that brought the underlying tensions into open violence. The overwhelming support of the Chinese for the opposition in the 1969 elections and their outrageous celebrations of the success was only a mere 'good starting point' or circumstance that brought these macro-societal levels of economical and political frustrations between them into an open clash.

Again the crisis in 1987 which almost threw the country into another riot was started from 'above', political and administrative decisions made by the Government on the

promotion of non-Mandarin trained headmasters and administrators in Chinese schools. The Chinese saw this as a threat to their culture and language. In response to the Chinese public rally of protest at the decision, the Malays' UMNO Youth launched a massive counter rally of the Malays in support of the Government's decision. The crisis brought about the famous massive detentions called *operasi lalang* in 1987, to stop the outburst of another conflict in the country. This decision of the government again can be seen as another circumstance that almost brought the underlying conflict between the Malay political supremacy and the political demands of the non-Malays into open riot.

No observer of Malaysian politics would deny that the fundamental ethnic problems related to the political and economical power relations between the Malays and non-Malays, especially those institutionalised in the political system, are still the very source of ethnic conflict in Malaysia. Ethnic conflict in the society, as such, cannot be understated. As one observer states:

> *Our ethnic problems are a consequence of our colonial history .... But what have we done in the past 30 years to diminish our diversities? The first decade of our existence as an independent country has been wasted, and the last two decades have seen exacerbation of ethnic tensions. Now after a third of a century of political independence, a decade away from the twenty first century, we are still pre-occupied with racial and religious issues that may bring catastrophe to this beautiful land of ours* (Rajakumar, 1989: 2).

Many observations by Malaysian scholars have reiterated the very persistence of ethnic problems in Malaysia. A political economist, Sundaram, observed:

> *Malaysian society and culture has been dominated by racial and ethnic preoccupations. It is widely agreed in Malaysia today that the greatest threat to stability, especially since the late 1960s, has been inter-ethnic disharmony.... Most Malaysians would no longer deny that inter-ethnic relations have been deteriorating since the 1950s, and especially since the mid-1960s. This deterioration is clearly evident on at least three fronts: economic, cultural and political. Although involving many non-ethnic dimensions, it is the ethnic dimensions of these developments which have received most public and political attention* (1990: 229).

The twenty-year period from 1970 to 1990 is a very important era. The New Economic Policy was implemented as a major policy to overcome the imbalance between the Malays and the non-Malays in the economic sector in order to achieve the goal of national unity. The policy clearly based its assumptions on, first, poor ethnic relations as result of the Malays' economic disadvantage, and second, as a remedy, overcoming the Malays' disadvantage to improve ethnic relations in Malaysia. But as Osman Rani, another researcher, observed:

> *The first question is: if the National Economic Policy's (NEP) assumption can be accepted, i.e. ethnic relations can be improved through interaction and cooperation between Bumiputra and non-Bumiputra via participation in the same and equal economic activities, than any change towards achieving the goals of the NEP should reinforce this process of integration. Unfortunately, this did not happen. On the contrary, ethnic relations in Malaysia seem to have become more serious, more so ever, after the economic depression in the mid 1980s, and towards the end of the 20 year period of the implementation of the NEP* (1989: 12-13).

A similar view was also expressed by Sanusi Osman, a researcher in Sociology:

> *After 31 years of independence, and after the period of New Economic Policy has almost come to an end, the question of national unity is still a problem that has become more serious. In fact, ethnic relations have become more strained to the extent that even petty issues which are not important could bring about opposition and animosity between ethnic.... Among the majority of the people, there still exists feelings of suspicions, jealousy and dissatisfaction among one another. Each ethnic group feels that they are not given fair treatment by the government* (1989: 13).

Sanusi Osman has also argued in one of his earlier articles (1983) that ethnic ties among the Malaysians are still an influential factor which promotes unity within each ethnic group, and undermines or weakens cross border integration such as class integration. This observation is again very much consistent with others' observations (Ackerman, 1986; Nagata, 1975). Ackerman's study on trade unionism in Malaysia shows that the class loyalty strategy to unify co-workers in factories was always subverted by the pressure of ethnicity at both lower and higher levels. Statistical findings from research carried out by a group of academics in 1988 also indicates that the majority of ethnic leaders believe that although economic disparity between the ethnic groups has reduced since the implementation of the New Economic Policy, ethnic relations have deteriorated (Halim, et Al, 1989).

All the above observations contest the 'harmony' views, although these observers are well aware that the everyday transactions at the micro-level between Malays, Chinese and

Indians are taking place 'as usual' without them openly arguing, or quarrelling about the macro-level ethnic issues. We must ask whether the evidence from Mansor's study and the current one, which mainly concentrates on this level, necessarily means that the importance of ethnicity for the Malays and Chinese, or the potency of ethnic conflict, has reduced in the lives of Malaysians.

Changes in the geographical distribution of the people which may bring together people of different ethnic origins does not necessarily bring about changes in their attitudes to promote a sense of unity, or a cohesive polyethnic community. While the Chinese and Malays may now be more frequently 'thrown together', particularly in the modern urban context, we cannot simply assume that the barriers to ethnic interactions at all levels and spectra of Malaysian life have been eliminated satisfactorily, or that attitudes have changed. We cannot assume that an increase in interethnic transactions will automatically lead to more harmonious ethnic relations. Even in the urban environment, as Raymond Lee's study of social networks and ethnic interactions tends to support, the ethnic affiliations have been reinforced continuously via political and religious organisational membership, friendship pattern and kinship contacts (1986). From his survey Lee summarises,

> *The data seem to suggest that outside the work situation, interaction tends to be more oriented towards kin and fellow ethnics than colleagues and other ethnic group members...The survey findings provide some support for the idea that the urban environment reinforces ethnic affiliations* (1986: 122).

It may be useful at this juncture for us to make a distinction between 'ethnic traditionalism' and 'ethnic antagonism'. These are among the important manifestations of ethnic phenomena which could explain the possible trends that influence ethnic relations in the changing character of Malaysian society. By 'ethnic traditionalism' we refer to trends in the society that support the preservation of ethnic culture and ethnic religious beliefs and practices. To some extent it is happening in Malaysia, but in quite an uneven way, because the ethnic culture and religion which are most preserved in Malaysia are that of the Malays. This is because their cultural and religious attributes are given a kind of privileged position within Malaysia, thus preserving the traditional aspects of Malay culture and religion (Islam) and therefore in that sense, Malay ethnicity; whereas there is not the same provision to protect or promote Chinese or Indian culture, religious beliefs or practices, or to protect their languages.

The survey on the usage of language among the subjects in this study, for example, shows a kind of acculturation that is very one-sided (see chapter 6). It is the Chinese who are learning to speak Malay. But the Malays uniformly speak Malay and a very high percentage of them may also speak English especially among the educated group like the sample in the study. But the Chinese subjects speak Chinese, Malay and English which makes them trilingual (the same is true for the Indians). The Malays, however, speak just either Malay or Malay and English. From this we could say that

cultural differences are diminishing because there no longer is a situation where the Malays speak only Malay, Chinese speak only Chinese and Indians speak their language as the non-Malay groups are acculturated towards the Malay language. On the other hand, it does not so much reflect acculturation and modernisation, i.e. the modern society requires the uniformity of language and the more advanced the modern society becomes the more intense to drive out the minority languages. In Malaysia this does not so much reflect modernisation or acculturation. It actually reflects the Malay cultural privilege. The reason why the Malay language becomes dominant is not because it is the requirement of a modernising society that there is a language of discourse shared by all. It is because the Malays want to secure for the Malay language this privileged position and to promote the Malay culture and Malay language through national policies of the state.

It is quite possible that in some respects cultural differences may diminish so that in cultural terms there may be a coming closer together of Malays, Chinese and Indians. But it does not necessarily mean that because of this greater closeness culturally, in the formal sense, there is an absence of 'ethnic antagonism'. The factors that affect ethnic antagonism are not the same factors that affect ethnic cultures. The factors that affect ethnic cultures are the cultural and language policies, and the extent to which traditional culture, form of worship and family life can be preserved in the condition of modern Malaysia. What affects

ethnic antagonism is quite a different thing, which is whether Chinese and other non-Malays feel that they are being discriminated against in Malaysian society. Those are quite separate issues in many respects, although not altogether separate. In many respects the factors that affect ethnic traditionalism are different from the factors that affect ethnic antagonism.

The present survey also provides further evidence that supports the continuation of the salience of ethnicity in modernising Malaysia. Issues and problems that have developed around the Malays' privileges and power, ethnic preferential policies and the non-Malays' rights seem to have strongly mobilised and sustained Malaysian ethnicity and potential ethnic conflict in the society. This was reflected in the Malay and Chinese subjects' sharply divided political attitudes concerning key issues and problems, i.e. racial discrimination, migration of dissatisfied Malaysians, unequal access to education, corruption, political disunity and ethnic differences (Chapter 6). Further analysis in Chapter 7 also indicates that 'modernisation', in particular the increase in interethnic contact, is not sufficient to diminish the effect of ethnically divisive issues in Malaysia that creates ethnic antagonism. The highly politicised ethnicity in Malaysia leads us to consider the dynamic nature of ethnicity and ethnic conflict at the different levels of social relationships.

Micro, Meso and Macro Level Ethnicity

In any multi-ethnic society, not only can both differences and similarities, ethnic consciousness and national consciousness, ethnic norms and universal norms, ethnic conflict and national unity, co-exist or develop. They can also exist or be expressed in unequal degrees at different levels of social relations between members of ethnic groups. In other words, both dividing and conflicting elements on the one hand, and boundary reduction and integration on the other hand could be conceivable consequences when two or more ethnic groups meet. Both these processes can take place side by side at different spheres and levels of relationships.

Social boundaries between ethnic groups may reduce at one level of interethnic relations, depending on the very nature of social contexts. But at other levels these boundaries may be reinforced in society. To be more clear about the way in which people may express their ethnicity, or ethnic conflict in private and public lives, we need to make a distinction between the levels of social structure at which ethnicity and ethnic conflict are articulated. This means that we need to understand the very nature of social contexts that constitute the different levels of social structure. This basically involves the understanding of the three different levels of interethnic relations; that is, in the circles of:

(i) informal interpersonal relations which involve family and friends,

(ii) formal working and business relationships in organisational circumstances and,

(iii) at the level of abstract relationships, in relation to political rights, status and power relations and struggle at the higher societal level.

We may refer to these three levels that encompass the whole ethnic structures in a society respectively as micro, meso and macro-ethnicity. Some scholars have in fact directly or indirectly, using different terms, recognised the importance of these levels, especially micro and macro-levels, in exploring the way in which ethnic identities, loyalties and conflicts may be articulated in society, including Malaysia (Despres, 1975b:87-118: Eriksen, 1993:46-48; Jenkins, 1994: 197-223; Jesudason, 1990:9; Nash, 1989:30;). For example, as Jesudason states,

> *...a Malay and a Chinese in Malaysia or a Tamil and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka might co-own a business and belong to the same social clubs. They are socially integrated and co-operative at the micro level. This does not mean that at the macro level of group contention they will not press for beneficial policies (in terms of resource allocation, employment, educational, and ownership quotas, and language policies) for their group* (1990: 9).

The idea in Sociology of different levels of social relations is not new, especially the distinction between the micro and meso levels. This basically corresponds with the distinction made by Cooley (1909) between the *primary* and *secondary* (levels of) social relationships in a society. Micro-level interactions are those of Primary relations in which contact is informal, personal, intimate and usually face-to-face in nature. One example is an interpersonal

friendship, or marriage relationship, that may be formed between a Malay and a Chinese person. Meso-level contact is that of secondary relations which are more formal and impersonal in nature and occur in organisational relations. An example of this is the formal working relationship among a Malay, Chinese and Indian in public and private offices, companies, factories and schools.

The macro-level refers to a higher abstract level where national political decisions are made and where the political mobilisation of ethnic allegiance is created through ethnic political organisations, or built into the political institution of the State. It is frequently beyond the immediate purview of the individual - he or she knows of this world (more or less perfectly, more or less dimly) but does not live in it in the face-to-face to sense, despite the fact that his or her life is profoundly shaped by the tendencies of this macro-world. These political processes and decisions, as far as the Malaysian case is concerned, are ingrained in the Constitution; that is the very definition of the Malays and the granting of special rights to them in the Constitution. Consequently, the political processes of ethnic mobilisation (via ethnic political parties and leaders) and the framework of the ethnic coalition Government, together with the formulation of public policies (such as the New Economic Policy, National Cultural Policy, Language and Education Policy, and Islamisation), are the predominant factors shaping ethnic allegiance in Malaysian politics and making ethnicity more

institutionalised. Macro-level political power structure between the Malays and non-Malays forms the *modus operandi* for the persistence of ethnicity, identity and ethnic conflict in Malaysia.

In both the 1969 riot and the 1987 crisis, for example, the relationship of the issues of Malay's special right and the political dominance underlying the political structure to the respective ethnic group members at the personal level is in fact indirect. Yet the influence of these issues is real. People are conscious of these political issues that provoke ethnic conflict and Malaysian ethnicity. The Malays are conscious of their political hegemony, but also at the same time aware that their economic power is not consistent with their dominant position in politics. This provokes a feeling of insecurity and resentment towards the non-Malays. On the other hand, though the non-Malays, especially the Chinese, are relatively more affluent, they too are aware of their marginalised political power and increasing alienation from the larger political system since 1969. From the non-Malay's point of view, the political power structure, as Chee puts it, '...is not more congruent with the multi-racial character of the country and fear that their competitive economic advantage will eventually be eroded by Malay political power and interventionist government' (1991: 2). Similarly, this provokes the feelings of insecurity and resentment toward the Malays.

The above larger political issues and the Malay's and non-Malay's resentments toward each other, however, do not influence their daily interethnic interactions, nor are they openly expressed. Everyday interactions would as usual be influenced by pragmatic considerations. Material self-interest and personal obligations can continue to play an important role as well as other noble actions of cooperation and tolerance and sincere efforts to bridge and accommodate ethnic differences at the personal level. Without such basic cooperation and attitudes of tolerance among ethnic groups, it would be highly impossible for any multiethnic society like Malaysia to carry out its daily business. In any modern society, people understand that showing overtly bigoted ethnic prejudice, attitudes and hatred are simply not polite or consistent with the democratic principles of modern society. In addition, since 1969, the 'sensitive issues' amendments and the Sedition Act have also suppressed open expressions of ethnic prejudice and animosity among the people of Malaysia. But the political issues that articulate and represent macro-ethnicity have always been present in Malaysia politics and in the minds of people. It is merely a question of provoking or manipulating circumstances to bring out into open violence the underlying conflicts between people of different ethnic backgrounds.

Latent potential ethnic conflict ingrained in a society needs to be identified. We cannot restrict our examination to the way in which people may express their ethnic sentiments to one another at an interpersonal level, that is

the dimension of micro-ethnicity. The area that needs equal, if not more, attention is at the societal level of macro-ethnicity which, in the modern world context, is frequently mobilised and manipulated as instruments by the State and by political leaders. We cannot push aside any wider political and economical levels of relationship between ethnic groups that might sharpen differences, thereby increasing the salience of macro ethnicity. The processes of economic individualism, accommodation, acculturation or assimilation might have brought pragmatic workable interactions in daily life among people of different ethnic origin; but these processes may not have an effect on macro-ethnicity.

Present Findings: An Alternative View

Evidence in the present survey (and also in Mansor's) may appear to show that where self-interest and personal obligations are apparently in conflict with ethnic preferences, many, if not all, Chinese (and Malays) will choose universalistic and practical options (for Tan Seng Seng). In the present survey, this was the result in ten out of the thirteen hypothetical situations studied. This simplistic interpretation, based on the number of cases in which the majority of the subjects chose the non-ethnic choices, could be misleading. In some circumstances people may select universalistic options. This is probably because non-ethnic interests that come into conflict with ethnic preference might have been valued higher than the latter. But it could be that people also choose pragmatic and

universalistic alternatives because these may not be perceived by them as real threats to their ethnic attachment and identity, even though it may appear so outwardly to an observer. We need to explore critically further the nature and the level of ethnic relations observed in these studies to understand the real strength of ethnicity in Malaysia. This should also include an attempt to assess critically whether the observations have satisfactorily measured all the major possible areas or levels of ethnic relations and conflict in Malaysia.

In disclosing the relative strength of Chinese ethnic alignment to that of their self-interest of a material and status kind, as well as personal obligations, the present study has revealed different social circumstances where ethnicity is significantly expressed in different degrees of importance. Consequently, this also indicates the considerable importance of theoretical thinking in understanding different levels of ethnicity. This is to expand further our understanding of the dynamic and complex nature of ethnicity. As can be seen in the Table 8.2, the circumstances representing Tan Seng Seng's choices of ethnic preference were presented in ranking order from those highly influenced by ethnic attachment to those which were virtually not influenced by the ethnic interest at all.

Table 8.2: Percentage of Subjects Making Ethnic Preference Choices (Tan Seng Seng)

	Circumstances	Chinese	Malay
1.	child adoption	82	70
2.	mixed marriage	69	80
3.	zoo trip	66	57
4.	wedding invitation	34	36
5.	support Malay boss	25	32
6.	child minding	17	30
7.	office boy candidate	15	17
8.	shopping	14	28
9.	child's playmate	9	11
10.	renting out house	4	2
11.	bring Malay friend home	1	4
12.	housekey	1	2
13.	Indian friend's party	0	1

There are thirteen cases where Tan Seng Seng (or a proxy, eg. daughter) makes choices which can be regarded as ethnic preference versus other choices. As regards the cases where a majority (or less) make ethnic preference choices, they may be ranked as follows:

(a) A clear majority makes ethnic preference choices. This includes child adoption (82%), mixed marriage (69%) and the zoo trip (66%);

(b) A substantial minority (one quarter to one third) makes ethnic preference choices. This includes the wedding invitation (34%) and supporting Malay boss (25%);

(c) A small minority makes ethnic preference choices. This includes child minding (17%), office boy candidate (15%), shopping (14%), child's playmate (9%);

(d) Almost 'none' make ethnic preference choices. This includes renting out house (4%), bringing Malay friend home, housekey (1%) and Indian friend's party (0%).

If we examine the Malays' judgement of Tan Seng Seng, it is clear that they too have ranked the circumstances in almost exactly the same way. In the 'majority' category, the Malays' ranking of judgements is 2, 1 and 3, i.e, mixed marriage (80%), child adoption (70%) and the zoo trip (57%). In the 'substantial minority' category, their ranking is also 4 and 5, i.e, wedding invitation (36%) and support Malay boss (32%). In the 'small minority' category, their ranking is 6, 8, 7 and 9, i.e, child-minding (30%), shopping (28%), office boy candidate (17%) and child's playmate (11%). In the almost 'none' category, the ranking is 11, 10/12, and 13, i.e, bringing Malay friend home (4%), renting-out house and housekey (2%) and Indian friend's party (0%).

There may be some overlapping in matters or interests involved between the circumstances observed in this study. As such, each of the above four groups of circumstances, which were ranked and categorised by the criterion of the strength of ethnic influence, is not in any way to be perceived as exclusive in its nature, or in the interest it may represent. Practically, it is difficult to control or discretely differentiate the nature of each circumstance. However, some general characterisation of the nature of the above four groups of circumstances can be established. This would allow us to see the way in which the Chinese (via an ethnic representative) are perceived to attach the importance of ethnicity to these categories of circumstances that come to exist at different levels of social relations.

Firstly, with regard to the matters relating to traditional private family life and cultural-religious practices (case 1, 2), the results show that the Chinese do strongly attach more importance to their ethnicity than to other areas. These areas represent some of the micro-level informal social relations. This in fact seems to support the traditional notion of ethnicity around which central or original experiences are believed to be clustered, and passed from generation to generation through kinship of family and cultural practices. Some situations, like attending the wedding, child-minding and the zoo trip, though, are not strictly kinship matters as are the above two examples. They could also be perceived fairly as culturally significant, or as family affairs within the same ethnic group. Thus, these are capable of inspiring either a majority, a substantial majority, or small minority of individuals to opt for actions that are consistent with ethnic sentiments.

Secondly, there are formal circumstances and organisational interactions. Good examples of this are cases of supporting one's Malay boss, the office boy candidate and shopping. These are the next important matters that seem to have an appeal to ethnic sentiments or attitudes. Strictly speaking, this can be considered as meso-level ethnicity. But because of the Government's policy to increase the participation of the Malays in all modern sectors of economy and administration, the people in Malaysia may find it difficult to express overtly their ethnic preference in public formal

organisational circumstances. This will be explained further later in this chapter. The subjects seem to reflect this in the case of supporting boss which also resembles the struggle for power or leadership at the organisational level. Compared with other cases, in this case a substantial percentage of the Chinese (33% for Tan Seng Seng and 45% for his mother) could not easily indicate their preference.

Thirdly, although these circumstances are close in nature to the first group, in the sense that they are also micro-level informal relations, very marginal or virtually no importance is attached to ethnicity. These are the circumstances of informal personal business ventures, or relationships with friends and neighbours (case 9, 10, 11, 12, 13). These circumstances, however, can be differentiated from the first group. This collection of social circumstances does not directly involve matters relating to family, or culture, but falls outside ethnic group affairs.

Different Levels of Ethnicity in Malaysia: An Assessment

We need to take further the concept of different levels and the nature of interethnic relationships, as partly confirmed in this survey, to a wider context of Malaysian society in order to understand more comprehensively Malaysian ethnicity. We mentioned earlier that the existence of different levels of ethnicity has been recognised by some scholars. The concept tells us how ethnicity in a multiethnic society like Malaysia is articulated and

expressed at different levels of social structure. We are looking into the very nature of social context, or social relationship in which ethnicity may take relevance. As social relationships and experiences are interrelated, this also effects the importance people may attach to ethnicity, ethnic identity and allegiance at the various levels of social relationships.

In Malaysia, as Nash puts it:

> *Cooperation, accommodation, and confrontation among the communal groups and individuals who compose these categories take place at three analytical distinct levels: political, the economic, and the world of ordinary, daily interaction. These are analytical levels, and the separation is a construct of the observer or the analyst, for political symbols and acts may suffuse daily life, and economic considerations and activities deeply involve the flow of daily life and often form the stuff of politics and other kinds of social and cultural activities. ... ethnicity... in Malaysia comes near to ... a total social fact, in that its strands lead into all of social life* (Nash, 1989: 30).

Different expressions of the strength of ethnic sentiments which vary significantly according to the nature of social circumstances and levels of social relations, are highly conceivable in Malaysia. As social actors of a modern society, for the Chinese as well as members of other ethnic groups in Malaysia, it is only practical that their action in society is influenced by both individualistic and group interests which very much depend on the level of social relationship.

Firstly, ethnic group interest is a possible influence because the Malays, Chinese and Indians are still in possession of their own unique set of cultural and social

values which gives real meaning to their everyday life and maintains the survival of their ethnic group politics. Maintenance of cultural boundaries among them are strongly reinforced by the continuation of parallel ethnic social institutions.

Among the important influences is the practice of endogamy. Different religious beliefs which widely separate them - all Malays are Muslims, and the majority of the non-Malays are non-Muslims (Buddhists, Hindus, Christians and Sikhs) - also form a strong barrier. Mixed marriages across ethnic barriers, for example, are hardly encouraged or accepted in the 'ethno-religious' family.[3] Inclusion of members of other ethnic groups into family kinship, private affairs or even in a simple day outing can give rise to a difficult decision or choice to make. In this micro-sphere, according to Nash, religious sensibilities become the principal boundary maintaining mechanisms in Malaysia (1989: 35-38). These religious sensibilities have in recent years become more sensitive and an important consideration especially with religious revivalism among the Malays (Lee, 1988). This micro-ethnicity which is expressed, or practised at the primary level of social relationships, especially within the family, is creating a strong and continuous influence among

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3 Besides the old amalgamated small groups (*Baba-nyonya, Chitty and Erusians*), mixed marriages among the Malays, Chinese and Indians of modern Malaysia have not produced any socially significant mixed-blood people to attract research work. Since marriage is still considered very much a family, cultural and religiously significant matter, opposition to such a marriage of an individual in a family is a common phenomenon (Mariappan, 1984). Even among the random samples of the present study, only 2% of the subjects are from mixed marriages.

individuals, urging them to act in accordance with cultural and social values and practices of their ethnic group.

While the people of different ethnic origins may attach importance to their ethnicity in their family circle, it does not in any way restrain them from forming interethnic interpersonal relations, or carrying out transactions with others in various other simple social matters outside the realm of family, culture and religion. Individuals need to be pragmatic and clear about their feelings and personal considerations, especially in the urban environment where the social contacts and transactions between the Malays, Chinese, Indians and others are unavoidable. In such mixed ethnic environments and social contacts, self-interest and values of personal obligations can be a strong influence among individuals in dealing with matters that fall outside one's family, cultural and religious affairs. Possibly derived from wider universal democratic values of equality and personal freedom, liberalism and economic individualism, they can play a vital role in the enhancement of individualistic considerations and self-interest that is more practical, convenient, or ethical in dealing with members of other ethnic groups, or more importantly, with the co-citizens of the country.

Areas of face-to-face social contact, mainly through neighbourhood and friendship circles, are still, however, very much limited for the majority of people in Malaysia. Some of the structural factors that limit the interethnic

interactions still persist in society. By and large, the distribution of the Malaysian ethnic population in the urban and rural areas, and in occupational and economic sectors, has not totally broken down the 'traditional' form of spatial-geographical and occupational divisions among the major ethnic groups (chapter 1). Most of the Malay population (70%) still lives in the rural areas, although there is a rapid movement into the urban areas and new sectors. Less than 30% of Malays live in urban areas. In the government public sector, the Malay population has increased even more at all levels since the implementation of the New Economic Policy. In 1990, the Malay labour force in the government service sector was 587,300 while the non-Malays were 273,900. Between 1980 and 1990 the non-Malay population in this sector increased by only 0.02%, compared to 50.9% of the Malays (Lim, 1989). The majority of the Malays are still in the traditional agricultural sector (about 73% in 1985). Private economic sectors, business and trade are still in the hands of the majority of the Chinese (chapter 1, Table 1.2 & 1.3). Although the features of 'Malay areas', 'Chinese areas' and 'Indian areas', 'Malay occupations' and 'non-Malay occupations' have reduced, these barriers are not totally eliminated from the Malaysian scene. Wider opportunities for micro-level informal interethnic relations are still lacking.

In Malaysia, industrialisation, modernisation and urbanisation came to play a greater role in society after Independence. These processes have expanded social relations

of a secondary kind, that is, the meso-level interactions in public organisations where the members of different ethnic groups share sets of interactions that are relatively impersonal and formal. This mainly happens as a direct consequence of the government's objective of 'restructuring society' as stated in the New Economic Policy. This policy has since then continuously increased the Malays' participation in the formal sectors of modern occupations and educational institutions (Goh, 1991; Ramasamy, 1993) as well as in the informal social circles of urban neighbourhoods. As a consequence these may have increased interethnic contact in the formal occupational sectors, but not yet at a satisfactory level. This is mainly because, while the Malay population has increased in the private sectors of formal organisations, they are still a large majority in the government sectors (Goh, 1991: 81-82).

Through the implementation of the National Education and Language Policy, all teaching through the medium of English was converted to 'national' schools and Malay was introduced as the medium of instruction, even at the universities. These changes thereby increased the intake of Malay students in large numbers, in the formerly non-Malay dominated institutions. New universities and colleges - University Science of Malaysia, National University of Malaysia, University of North Malaysia, University Technology Malaysia, University Islam Malaysia, and the Mara College - have been opened to increase the intake of Malay students in higher education. In these government-funded institutions of

higher learning, the percentage of Malay students has increased from 40% (3,237) in 1970 to 67% (23,838) in 1985. But the representation of the Chinese students dropped from 49% (4,009) to 26% (9,142) (Goh, 1991: 77-78). Although the number of non-Malay pupils also increased to a certain extent in former Malay-medium schools in the urban areas, in the rural areas and East Coast states, Malay pupils are still the dominant group. Two colleges which cater mainly for a single ethnic group should be mentioned here. These are the government-funded Mara college for the Malays, and Tunku Abdul Rahman College for the Chinese (98% in 1985). At the primary level, some Chinese and Indians do still send their children to their own ethnic vernacular schools.

At these meso-levels of formal interactions, overt expressions that could be regarded as ethnically prejudiced would be considered highly sensitive and should be avoided. However, ethnic group members may maintain their own informal private and confidential intra-ethnic relations within such formal organisations.[4] This is because the people, especially the non-Malays, are aware of the sensitivity of the government policy which was introduced for the sole purpose of correcting the non-Malays' domination in the modern urban sectors by open pro-Malay

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4 For example, my own observation as hostel warden (1985-1991) and lecturer at University Science Malaysia since 1984 shows that although students of different ethnic backgrounds may take the same courses and together attend lectures, may do joint assignments and stay in the same hostel rooms and participate in some games together periodically, they still strongly maintained their intimate informal co-ethnic relations and privacy with regards to ethnically sensitive matters, and they vote for own ethnic candidates during the yearly Student Union election.

strategies. The Chinese fellowman's intention to replace their Malay head of department with a Chinese, as in the case of 'supporting boss', can be a highly risky affair, since the participation of the Malays at all levels in business organisations is supported by the policy. As this may also incorporate other government policies (such as the national language policy), Richard Basham's observation on one of the incidents at a Malaysian university proved the reluctance at the meso-level of social relations in taking any action of ethnic consideration, or risking accused of so doing. He writes,

> *Writing portions of examination papers in Malay has also created dissension among faculty....A school board meeting held to evaluate the faculty's ability to grade examinations in Malay produced a virtual consensus of opposition to the policy....The lecturers' continued objection to the policy was terminated only when a local lecturer reminded the meeting in an irony laden voice, 'Our discussion is becoming subversive' (1983:73).*

However, this is the level where most people in a society would be directly involved in competition for economic resources, or in plain language, for a job, promotion, better pay, education and training. These are matters of 'bread and butter'. The Chinese and Indians would not risk their ethnic chauvinism at this level because of the government policy, but it causes frustration and resentment among the non-Malays toward the Malays and the Government's economic policy. As for the Malays, their struggle for advancement in the modern sectors of the economy is not over yet, although officially the New Economic Policy came to an end in 1990. The Government decided to continue with the

economic strategies of the NEP to help the Malays under the present National Development Policy (1991-2000). Ethnic inequalities, competition and resentment that are created in this meso-economic sphere mean that it is not an easy matter for Malaysians to show less concern for their ethnic sentiments and ethnic identity.

Besides the different nature of social contexts at the micro and meso levels of social relations, there also exist in the society at the macro level issues that create and sustain the importance of ethnicity, ethnic identity and conflict. Although this macro ethnicity is articulated abstractly on the grand stage of state political structures and therefore beyond the control of ordinary people, in effect it is capable of creating strong ethnic consciousness, ethnic identity and issues of ethnic conflict continuously in the minds of people at the micro and meso levels.

In Malaysia, the importance of ethnic classification and inequality of political power status between the Malays and the non-Malays is a deliberate form of legalised political measures. Malaysian ethnicity is reinforced and supported by rules and the law of the Constitution. At the official level, the institutionalisation of ethnicity is reflected in the frequent incorporation of information of a person's ethnic origin in government documentation. This becomes a kind of continuous reminder to Malaysians of their ethnic identity and consequently their political rights and status in public life. The documentation of information about one's

ethnic origin in everyday activities as registration for admission in schools, application for driving licences, jobs, businesses, acquiring public shares and places in the universities thus reinforces ethnic identity as the Malaysian citizens' primary public identity. This is especially applicable to jobs, businesses and admission into the universities and scholarships, which are highly competitive in nature, and where the quota system has been introduced to the Malays' advantage.

At the highest level exists the legalised ingredient for such a political administrative strategy of ethnic classification and this is the very constitutional definition of a *Malay*. They are defined as people who speak Malay and practise the Malay custom and Muslim religion. This definition cannot be understood in isolation from the other constitutional principle that defines the 'Special Rights' or privileges for the Malays as *bumiputra* of the country. These constitutional definitions are in effect a very important categorisation of political status for the non-Malays as well. In pointing out this implication, Stephen Chee notes:

> *Non-Malay, however, is a social category, a negative referent of not being a member of the Malay race, socially defined, without any imputation that non-Malays form a solitary group. Non-bumiputra has a specifically political connotation and, indeed, might have acquired a quasi-legal status because of its frequent incorporation in government documents as well as social communication* (1991: 10, fn. 2).

The second stage is the way in which this macro-ethnicity is articulated in the formulation of public policies which carry with them the institutionalised notion of ethnic differences, identity and political right status. Among such policies are a national language and education, national culture, and most importantly, the New Economic Policy, and later, Islamisation. These policies, which are consistent with Malay political hegemony and nationalism, are aimed all in all at correcting the Malays' disadvantage in the economy, and promoting Malay-Muslim national culture and identity. Malay nationalism in effect is an important socio-political trend that explains the dynamic nature of macro-ethnicity in the present Malaysian society. Indeed, Smith in his study of ethnic revivalism suggests that it is important 'to place political, social and cultural changes at the centre of analysis...in the process of ethnic revival' (1981: 5). Some examples of cultural and symbolic responses of Malay nationalism can be considered here.

Since 1969, the salience of macro-ethnicity has taken different routes, principally in the form of new Malay nationalism. This Malay nationalism has not only become a vehicle for the Malays' greater economic rationalisation[5] but more importantly, in recent years, for widening and reestablishing their claims and ethnic identity within the society through their cultural and religious symbols.

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5 *Economic rationalisation* in the case of Malay nationalism, as Lee explains, involves 'nationalist policies (that) dictate the direction of economic planning, which is assumed to be conducted under a 'scientific' programme to eliminate poverty and to rise Malay standards of living' (1990: 499-500).

Simultaneously, the Malays try to reestablish their inheritance to the political hegemony status as an unquestionable right and agreement in relation to the political status and rights of the non-Malays (Nawawi, 1990). The efforts to reinforce the cultural and religious identities of the Malays as supreme national identities are also consistent with their aspirations to reconstruct new dignified images of themselves, as well as to strengthen the claim to their being indigenous. They reject previous images that have cost them their pride as a social group. In earlier historical works, the Malay is quite often looked upon as not a 'pure' or 'original' ethnic or racial group as the Chinese and Indians, but only as a descendant of the Chinese (Harrison, 1964; Tweedie, 1953; Winstedt, 1953). Consequently, these historical beliefs seem not only to reject them as the earliest inhabitants of Malaysia, but their civilisation is also believed to have mainly evolved from Chinese and Indian cultural influences. Being not a 'pure' race, or not having an 'original' culture in the eyes of other co-citizens, especially the Chinese and Indians, are images that the Malays find very uncomfortable in the emergence of their nationalistic sentiments after Independence.

The urge to correct and rewrite history from the Malays' perspective which stems out of Malay Nationalism has especially inspired Malay scholars to look back and gather new material from archaeological evidence. For example, Malay scholars in rejecting the earlier theory argued,

> *... the theory - that Malays were decendants of migrants from the Yunnan province in southern China - as purely speculative and should be dismissed. ... archaeological discoveries seemed to indicate that there were already inhabitants in the Malay world as early as 35,000 years ago. ... between the period of 35,000 and 11,000 years ago ... the inhabitants of the Malay world were from the same stock and practicing the same culture. ... evidence in Yunnan showed the Malays were not from the province, but were the original inhabitants of the Malay world. ... There was also no evidence to show any connection culturally, or otherwise, between some 26 ethnic minorities in Yunnan and the inhabitants of the Malay world or Malay-Polynesian world* (STAR newspaper, 6.9.1994).

Other scholarly efforts which can be said to be consistent with this cultural-religious form of Malay nationalism include: rejection of the notion of modernisation in the Malay world as a wave brought by Western influence, but instead modernisation in the form of rational thinking is argued to have been brought into the lives of the Malays through earlier Islamic influences; rejecting Yap Ah Loy (a Chinese Captain) as the founder of the capital city of Kuala Lumpur; renaming the national language from 'bahasa Malaysia' which was introduced as a name symbolising national unity back to 'bahasa Melayu' or the Malay language. By doing so, the urge to sustain the already existing 'Malayness' via names like *'Keretapi Tanah Melayu'* (Malaysian Railway) and *'Askar Melayu Diraja'* (Royal Malay Regiment) could have become stronger, although there is not any obvious effort at present to change the name of the State from Malaysia to *'Tanah Melayu'* (Land of the Malays). In reality, the notion of the 'land of the Malays' has always been the core of the Malays' patriotism towards the country and their nationalism.

Also in recent years the ethno-religious identification among the Malays and the non-Malays has become intensified (Ackerman, Susan & Lee, 1988; Lee, 1990:482-502). Among the Malays especially, this has been reflected through their vigorous Islamic religious *'dakwah'* movements, government policy of Islamisation and the rise of radical fundamentalists who demand the establishment of an Islamic state in Malaysia. This kind of religious nationalism among the Malays has not only strengthened their ethnic identity but has also been able to accentuate the suspicions and feelings of separateness between the Malays and the non-Malays, if not a potential source of ethnic conflict in the future. The rising of the religious fundamentalist movement does threaten Malay solidarity to some extent. But the present Malay Government leadership is still able to mobilise support from the majority of the Malays. This is mainly done through implementing Islamic policies and exercising tough and extensive disciplinary measures to restrict the outward manifestations of divisions among the Malay community (Means, 1991: 123-131).

In the awakening of this new Malay nationalism, ethnic conflict in Malaysia, as pointed out by Raymond Lee (1986), has been inclined to take a form of 'status politics conflict'. According to him, conflict over status issues like the Merdeka University, requiring Malay attire for official functions and the question of who founded Kuala Lumpur (Raja Abdullah Jaafar or Yap Ah Loy) has taken front stage, instead of power issues in contemporary Malaysian

politics. This is due to the tight control over the discussion of sensitive matters and ethnic politics. The suppressive measures taken by the State, and cooperation among ethnic leaders in the present ruling government has provided political stability and economic growth for the country. Malaysia is one of the fast growing capitalist economies in Asia. The Government cannot afford to show any form of instability if it wishes to attract capital investment (Sundaram, 1989; Khalid, 1993). For this reason, it is committed to control or suppress any kind of ethnic unrest or overt expressions that might repeat the 1969 incident. Khalid writes,

> *...the suppression on the freedom of dissent which was prevalent in the 1980s is likely to continue in 1990s as the government emphasizes the need to maintain political stability which is indeed essential for attracting foreign investors. More than before, Mahathir's current administration sees the contribution of foreign investment in the Malaysian economy as vitally important* (1993: 113).

Political stability and economic growth are two important interrelated factors that will ensure the success of the multi-ethnic coalition Government of Malaysia. The government, with its Malay leaders, is willing to pursue an authoritarian style of government to ensure sound capitalistic economic growth in Malaysia. As the dominant political power in the Government, they have to ensure the State's role in meeting ethnic pressures from the Malays to increase their economic power in the society. The Malays' economic interests, as seen in the pressure from the expanding new Malay bourgeoisie for joint ventures with

foreign investors, have forced the government to look for capital investment from multinational cooperation. Expanding manufacturing sectors by attracting foreign investors would sustain the economic growth and employment as well as provide wealth, ownership and employment opportunities for the Malays in manufacturing (Jesudason, 1989: 166-192).

Under a highly ethnicised Malaysian political structure and economic policy, the political stability for economic growth inevitably depends on benign authoritarianism. Constitutional amendment of 'sensitive issues' and the Sedition Act, the Internal Security Act, the Official Secrets Act, the Printing Presses and Public Act, the Universities and Universities Colleges Act, the Industrial Relation Act and bans on public rallies have become important tools for the Government to suppress any radical political activists, open public discussions, or publications of ethnically sensitive issues and others that the government may consider as threatening public order. All these measures of control themselves reflect the very real fear of possible ethnic tensions and violence. These areas of sensitive issues and policies which are articulated from the 'above' level of political structure in society are in fact the real social force that sustains the importance of ethnic identification and ethnic antagonism and conflict.

Political conflict based on the political power structure between the Malays and non-Malays may manifest itself indirectly as conflict of status politics under the

suppression of freedom of dissent. Issues that have developed, or continue to develop in the future around this political power differences, may not interrupt daily micro-level interpersonal, or even casual interfamily informal relations. But the importance of ethnicity and ethnic allegiance and conflict among Malaysians that are articulated at the macro societal level persists in the process by which each group tries to realise their politico-cultural aspirations.

Concluding Remarks

Choosing a level of social relations for analytical purposes can be a very useful research strategy, but the observations are limited. Ethnicity in reality is an intricate societal phenomenon. In a society like Malaysia, we cannot simply be carried away even with the occurrence of wider interethnic interactions or cultural interactions and adaptations at everyday level. For example, in understanding the development of the Sino-Malay spirit cult of '*nadugong/keramat*', a Malaysian Chinese scholar stressed:

> *The development of this cult shows that Malaysian Chinese are increasingly aware of their ethnic identity vis-a-vis the Malay identity, whereby local-born Chinese seek to adapt themselves to the patterns of multiethnic cultures while at the same time trying very hard to maintain their ethnic boundaries through the organization of their own socio-cultural institutions.... This process renders the existing syncretized elements more complex and has served as an internal defence mechanism against, rather than as an unconditional submission to, the on going proselytizing ideologies of 'Malay nationalism' and 'Malay national culturism' based on the parameters of Malay culture, Malay language, Islam, and Malay aesthetic values* (Cheu, 1992:381).

The present study obviously has its own limitations. The study cannot be assumed to have employed a superior method to disclose thoroughly the salience of ethnicity at all levels of ethnic relations in the Malaysian society. By concentrating mainly on the social contexts of micro-ethnicity, the findings of individualistic approach of the present study (as well as Mansor's) have not allowed us to make inferences about macro-ethnicity in Malaysia without applying some degree of caution in the interpretation of the findings. As we can clearly see from the circumstances examined in this study, none of the hypothetical situations represented the area of macro-ethnicity in Malaysia. Even the areas of meso-level ethnicity were not explored fully. This is partly due to the difficulties involved in operationalising the abstract political issues of macro-level ethnicity into a concrete form of everyday affair and by using the indirect technique of an ethnic representative in hypothetical situations. The questions on the political attitudes of the subjects do, however, demonstrate the importance of issues at the macro-level in reinforcing Malaysian ethnicity and perpetuating such conflict in its society. The subjects have demonstrated great concern, discontent and conflicting views on the issues and strategies of differential treatments that stem from unequal political rights and status which form the basic structure of the political culture of Malaysian macro-ethnicity since Independence.

Nevertheless, this study has interestingly disclosed the plausible trends in the importance people may attach to ethnicity, as in the case of Chinese ethnicity, in different social circumstances that take place at the micro-level of daily interethnic interactions. At the personal micro-level where interethnic matters concerned do not threaten the basic form of private family kinship relations, traditional culture and religion, the Chinese (and Malays as indicated in Mansor's study) would probably be influenced strongly by self-interest and personal obligations.

Even other noble principles of cooperation, accommodation, equality, or a good personal character may lead to closer relations among individuals and families of different ethnic groups. However, this does not at all mean that the salience and the sensitivity of ethnicity as a potential form of ethnic conflict in Malaysia has been reduced or totally eliminated. At the competitive meso-level in the public economic and educational domains, people, especially the non-Malays, are bound to restrict their open or fanatical expression of ethnic attitudes, sentiments, or loyalty owing to the government's firm commitment towards the ethnic preferential policy to help the Malays' socio-economic advancement.

The level that needs equal attention, although not covered in the hypothetical questions of this study, is macro-level ethnicity. It is equally important for one to take into consideration factors or issues of macro-level that

influence ethnic relations in Malaysia. In fact this area is fundamental to Malaysian ethnicity. The importance of ethnicity, ethnic consciousness and ethnic conflict in the society are firmly ingrained at this level. Findings on political attitudes of the subjects has consistently supported the above arguments on the importance of macro-level ethnicity in Malaysia.

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

SECTION A

How would you respond to this hypothetical case?

1. Which one of the following persons do you consider would be a better leader for Malaysia and why?

   (a) Mr. Halim is from a royal family, educated at a university in England, served many years in the Malaysian Civil Service, entered Parliament and became the leader of his party.
   (b) Mr. Ong Cheng Piaw is the son of a big businessman, educated at a university in England, active in Parliament and became the leader of his party.
   (c) Mr. Zulkifli is the son of a rubber-tapper, educated at University of Malaya and then a university in England, active in Trade Unions, entered Parliament and became the leader of his party.
   (d) Mr. Wong Ting Seng is a son of a factory worker, educated at a university in England, active in Trade Unions, entered Parliament and became the leader of his party.

   (1) Whom would you choose?

   [1] Mr. Halim [2] Mr. Ong Cheng Piaw
   [3] Mr. Zulkifli [4] Mr. Wong Ting Seng
   [5] Others

   (2) Why the choice?

   _____

   _____

   In the hypothetical cases below, Tan Seng Seng is a clerk with a multinational engineering firm. How would you react to these cases?

2. Mr. Tan Seng Seng is going to take his children to the zoo this coming Sunday. Tan Seng Seng's son has been pestering his father to take along one of his friends on this trip.

   (1) Whom will Tan Seng Seng suggest to his son to take along on this trip?

   [1] Nasir, a doctor's son
   [2] Ah Chuan whose mother works as a housemaid
   [3] Others

   (2) Whom will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish her grandson to take along on this trip?

   [1] Nasir [2] Ah Chuan [3] Others

3. Tan Seng Seng has been patronizing Mr. Jaafar's grocery shop - noted for its cheapness and nearest to his house. Tan Seng Seng has been informed that in a week's time, Cheng San will be opening a second grocery shop in his neighbourhood.

(1) Where will Tan Seng Seng go?

[1] Cheng San's shop [2] Mr. Jaafar's Shop
[3] Others

(2) Where will his mother wish him to go?
[1] Cheng San's shop [2] Mr. Jaafar's Shop
[3] Others

4. Tan Seng Seng's daughter, attending one of the local universities, wonders whom she should vote as president of the university's Student Union.

(a) Ah Huat who takes religion as a personal choice.
(b) Ah Chong who prefers religion to be seen as a separate issue from politics.
(c) Ah Hock, besides belonging to the same religion as Tan Seng Seng, is also a committee member of the Chinese Students' Religious Society.

(1) For whom will Tan Seng Seng's daughter vote?
[1] Ah Huat [2] Ah Chong
[3] Ah Hock [4] Others

(2) For whom will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish her grand-daughter to vote?

[1] Ah Huat [2] Ah Chong
[3] Ah Hock [4] Others

5. Tan Seng Seng received two wedding invitations which happen to fall on the same day. He has to make up his mind as to which wedding he will give priority to attend first.

(1) To whose house will he go first?

[1] Hamid's house. He is a company director.
[2] Leong's house. He works as a storekeeper.
[3] Others.

(2) To whose house will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish him to go first?

[1] Hamid's house [2] Leong's house [3] Others

6. Tan Seng Seng will be attending the election of committee members of the local branch of his political party next week. The Treasurer's post is a keenly contested three-cornered fight. The previous Treasurer was found to have embezzled the party's fund.

(1) For whom will Tan Seng Seng vote?

[1] Chuah, a businessman linked to the Malay elite.
[2] Yap, a school teacher with grass-roots support from the local Chinese.
[3] Lee, a candidate backed by the Chinese Religious group.
[4] Others.

(2) Whom will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish him to vote?

[1] Chuah [2] Yap [3] Lee
[4] Others

7. Tan Seng Seng has to leave his house in a hurry to fetch his own family from the hospital. He has been expecting his sister to come any moment to assist his family, but he has waited as long as he can. He wonders whether to leave his front door unlocked or to leave the key with his next door Malay neighbour.

(1) What will Tan Seng Seng do?

[1] Leave the front door unlocked.
[2] Leave the key with his next door Malay neighbour.
[3] Others.

(2) What will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish him to do?

[1] Leave the front door unlocked.
[2] Leave the key with his next door Malay neighbour.
[3] Others.

8. Tan Seng Seng is arranging marriage for his son to one of his cousin's daughters. Given a choice, whom will his son choose - the fair-skin elder sister or her dark-skin younger sister?

(1) Whom will Tan Seng Seng's son choose?

[1] the fair-skin elder sister
[2] the dark-skin younger sister
[3] others

(2) Whom will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish her grandson to choose?

[1] the fair-skin elder sister
[2] the dark-skin younger sister
[3] others

9. Tan Seng Seng's daughter, Ah Siew who works in a factory making electronic components, was seen going out with her company's assistant personnel manager, a Malay, driving a silver metallic Volvo 340.

(1) How will Tan Seng Seng react?

[1] Approve [2] Disapprove
[3] Others

(2) How will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish him to react?

[1] Approve [2] Disapprove
[3] Others

10. Tan Seng Seng wants to adopt a child. The Social Welfare Department has sent him some forms to be filled and two coloured photographs of a fair looking Indian child and an unusually dark-skin Chinese Child.

(1) Whom will Tan Seng Seng choose?

[1] the unusually dark-skin Chinese child
[2] the fair-skin Indian child
[3] others

(2) Whom will his mother wish him to adopt?

[1] the unusually dark-skin Chinese child
[2] the fair-skin Indian child
[3] others

11. Tan Seng Seng has an Indian friend as his workmate. This Indian friend is throwing a wedding party for his daughter at his house.

(1) Will Tan Seng Seng go?

[1] Yes [2] No [3] Others

(2) Will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish him to go?

[1] Yes [2] No [3] Others

12. Mr. Rashid, a mechanical engineer who graduated from Oxford, has been the head of Tan Seng Seng's Mechanical Department for the past three years. A Chinese group within his department is trying to replace his boss with a Chinese candidate.

(1) Will Tan Seng Seng support his boss?

[1] Yes [2] No [3] Others

(2) Will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish him to support his boss?

[1] Yes [2] No [3] Others

13. Tan Seng Seng has a next door Malay neighbour who likes her child to play with Tan Seng Seng's two year daughter. Will he allow the Malay neighbour to take his daughter to their house for an afternoon?

(1) What will Tan Seng Seng say?

[1] Yes [2] No [3] Others

(2) What will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish him to say?

[1] Yes [2] No [3] Others

14. Tan Seng Seng has a house to rent. The house has been unoccupied for the past six months. A Malay accountant, with two young children, and his wife want to rent the house. Will Tan Seng Seng accept the Malay tenant or will he refuse and wait for Chinese tenants?

(1) What will Tan Seng Seng's reaction be?

[1] Accept [2] Refuse [3] Others

(2) What will Tan Seng Seng's mother's reaction be?

[1] Accept [2] Refuse [3] Others

15. Tan Seng Seng has a niece whose husband works as a school gardener. Theirs is a big family living in a small rented Chinese house next to a housing scheme. The niece supplements the meagre earnings of the husband by taking care of four tiny tots. One day a young Malay school teacher came to her house inquiring if she could take care of her one year old son too.

(1) Will Tan Seng Seng's niece say yes?

[1] Yes [2] No [3] Others

(2) What will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish her grand-daughter to say?

[1] Yes [2] No [3] Others

16. Tan Seng Seng's wife has been persuading her daughter to marry Jamil, her Malay friend's son who is considered by Tan Seng Seng's family as a good person, having close rapport with them, speaking fluent Chinese and familiar with Chinese lifestyle.

(1) Will Tan Seng Seng's daughter agree with her mother's proposal?

[1] Yes [2] No [3] Others

(2) Will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish her grand daughter to agree to the proposal?

[1] Yes [2] No [3] Others

17. Tan Seng Seng's twelve year old son wants to bring his Malay friends home to play.

(1) What will Tan Seng Seng say?

[1] Yes [2] No [3] Others

(2) What will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish him to say?

[1] Yes [2] No [3] Others

18. Tan Seng seng's office received two applications for a post of office boy in his company. Tan Seng Seng is asked to choose any one of the applicants: Abdul Taha and Lim Wong Peng who are equally suitable candidates, except that Abdul Taha is one of his neighbour's sons.

(1) Whom will Tan Seng Seng choose?

[1] Abdul Taha [2] Lim Wong Peng

(2) Whom will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish her son to choose?

[1] Abdul Taha [2] Lim Wong Peng

19. Tan Seng Seng and hid family were watching the live telecast of the Thomas Cup Badminton semi final between Malaysia and China.

(1) Which team would Tan Seng Seng have wanted to win?

[1] Malaysia [2] China

(2) Which team would Tan Seng Seng's mother have wanted to win?

[1] Malaysia [2] China

20. Tan Seng Seng's daughter is a member of the University's Chinese Students' Association. They are planning to give free tuition for primary school children as part of their community service programme. They have two options: tuition for children in a "national school", and tuition for children in a "national type" Chinese school.

(1) Which school would Tan Seng Seng want his daughter to choose?

[1] National school
[2] National type Chinese school

(2) Which school would Tan Seng Seng's mother wish her granddaughter to choose?

[1] National school
[2] National type Chinese school

21. Tan Seng Seng's son will be taking his "Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia" examination. He is planning to do revision with one of his classmates.

(1) With whom will Tan Seng Seng's son do revision?

[1] Eng Lip whose father is a business tycoon.
[2] Razak whose father is a clerk in the revenue department.
[3] Ghazali whose father is the director of a business firm.
[4] Lam Soon whose father is a clerk in the transport department.

(2) With whom will Tan Seng Seng's mother wish her grandson to do revision?

[1] Eng Lip whose father is a business tycoon.
[2] Razak whose father is a clerk in the revenue department.
[3] Ghazali whose father is the director of a business firm.
[4] Lam Soon whose father is a clerk in the transport department.

22. Tan Seng Seng's son has chosen to speak on "national integration and national identity in the year 2020" at a national level elocution contest. Two major points that he is going to stress are: first, Malaysian Chinese and others should adopt a Malay-based common name, and second, embrace Malay culture to foster national integration and identity.

(1) What would be Tan Seng Seng's personal reaction?

[1] Agree to first point
[2] Agree to second point
[3] Agree to both points
[4] Disagree to both points
[5] Others

(2) What would be Tan Seng Seng's mother's reaction?

[1] Agree to first point
[2] Agree to second point
[3] Agree to both points
[4] Disagree to both points
[5] Others

SECTION B

1. How often do you come into contact with members of other ethnic groups in general?

[1] Frequently
[2] Sometimes
[3] Seldom
[4] Never

2. How often do you come into contact with the following other ethnic groups?

(1) Malays
[1] Frequently
[2] Sometimes
[3] Seldom
[4] Never

(2) Chinese
[1] Frequently
[2] Sometimes
[3] Seldom
[4] Never

(3) Indians
[1] Frequently
[2] Sometimes
[3] Seldom
[4] Never

(4) Others
[1] Frequently
[2] Sometimes
[3] Seldom
[4] Never

3. Where do you come into contact with them in general? [multiple choice answer]

[1] Residential area
[2] Workplace
[3] Shopping centre
[4] At the children's school
[5] Public gatherings and festivals
[6] Organizational meetings
[7] Others

4. In which occupational categories are most of them? [a maximum of two choice answer]

[1] Fisherman, trishaw peddler, small farmer, odd job worker, petty trader
[2] Manual worker, factory worker, sales assistant
[3] General services worker, general office administrator, technician, teacher, nurse
[4] Businessman, merchant, wholesaler
[5] Private and government sectors executive and professional

5. How would you describe the relationship between ethnic groups in Malaysian and in your locality today?

In Malaysia	In Your Locality
[1] Good	[1] Good
[2] Moderate	[2] Moderate
[3] Bad	[3] Bad

6. How would you describe the relationship between ethnic groups in Malaysia and in your locality today compared to the situation 5 years ago?

In Malaysia	In Your Locality
[1] Has improved	[1] Has improved
[2] Remains the same	[2] Remains the same
[3] Has deteriorated	[3] Has deteriorated

7. How do you expect relations between ethnic groups in Malaysia and in your locality to change over the next 5 years?

In Malaysia	In Your Locality
[1] Will improve	[1] Will improve
[2] Remain the same	[2] Remain the same
[3] Will deteriorate	[3] Will deteriorate

8. How would you describe ethnic integration in Malaysia in the following areas/aspects?

(1) Political	[1] Satisfactory [2] Less satisfactory [3] Unsatisfactory [4] Others
(2) Economic	[1] Satisfactory [2] Less satisfactory [3] Unsatisfactory [4] Others
(3) Social	[1] Satisfactory [2] Less satisfactory [3] Unsatisfactory [4] Others
(4) Cultural	[1] Satisfactory [2] Less satisfactory [3] Unsatisfactory [4] Others
(5) Self-identity (as a Malaysian)	[1] Satisfactory [2] Less satisfactory [3] Unsatisfactory [4] Others

9. How would you describe the importance of your ethnic identity during the following times?

	Very important									Not important
5 years ago	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
At present	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5 years to come	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

10. Do you have negative feelings, prejudices or animosity towards other ethnic groups?

[1] Always [2] Sometimes
[3] Seldom [4] Never

11. Do you think that such feelings have prevented you from having a close, cordial or wide relationship with other ethnic groups?

[1] Always [2] Sometimes
[3] Seldom [4] Never

12. Do you remember the Rukunegara?

[1] Yes [2] Slightly [3] Not really

I am going to list seven statements. Please state if you:

[1] Very strongly agree [2] Strongly agree
[3] Very strongly disagree [4] Strongly disagree
[5] No particular feelings

13. It is disgraceful if people fail to stand while the country's National Anthem is being played.

[1] Very strongly agree [2] Strongly agree
[3] Very strongly disagree [4] Strongly disagree
[5] No particular feelings

14. Compared to other countries, there is much racial discrimination in Malaysia.

[1] Very strongly agree [2] Strongly agree
[3] Very strongly disagree [4] Strongly disagree
[5] No particular feelings

15. People should not be dependent on government programmes. These destroy people's ability to look after themselves.

[1] Very strongly agree [2] Strongly agree
[3] Very strongly disagree [4] Strongly disagree
[5] No particular feelings

16. The Indonesian migrants are socially undesirable. They take our jobs away.

[1] Very strongly agree [2] Strongly agree
[3] Very strongly disagree [4] Strongly disagree
[5] No particular feelings

17. Those who are dissatisfied with Malaysia should emigrate to another country of their choice.

[1] Very strongly agree [2] Strongly agree
[3] Very strongly disagree [4] Strongly disagree
[5] No particular feelings

18. This country does not belong to the Malays alone. It belongs to all Malaysians.

[1] Very strongly agree [2] Strongly agree
[3] Very strongly disagree [4] Strongly disagree
[5] No particular feelings

19. A multi-ethnic population in this country has proven to be more advantageous than disadvantageous.

[1] Very strongly agree [2] Strongly agree
[3] Very strongly disagree [4] Strongly disagree
[5] No particular feelings

20. What are the main problems faced in this country?

[1] Corruption [2] Religious deviation
[3] Poverty [4] Drug addiction
[5] Factionalism [6] Ethnic differences
[7] Unequal access to education [8] Others

SECTION C

1. What is your age?

[1] 30 & below [2] 31 - 50 [3] 51 & above

2. Your sex?

[1] Male [2] Female

3. What is your occupation?

[1] Fisherman, trishaw peddler, small farmer, odd job worker, petty trader
[2] Manual worker, factory worker, sales assistant
[3] General services worker, general office administrator, technician, teacher, nurse
[4] Businessman, merchant, wholesaler
[5] Private and government sectors executive and professional

4. In which occupational group would you place your family (parents) background?

[1] Fisherman, trishaw peddler, small farmer, odd job worker, petty trader
[2] Manual worker, factory worker, sales assistant
[3] General services worker, general office administrator, technician, teacher, nurse
[4] Businessman, merchant, wholesaler
[5] Private and government sectors executive and professional

5. In which sector do you work?

[1] Government [2] Private
[3] Working on your own

6. What is your religion?

[1] Islam [2] Buddhism [3] Hinduism
[4] Sikhism [5] Christianity [6] No religion
[7] Only believe in the existence of God

7. With which ethnic group or groups do you like to identify yourself? (eg. Malay, Javanese, Kelantanese; Chinese, Cantonese; Indian, Tamil; or others)

Please state:.....

8. With which ethnic group or groups do you like to identify yourself? (eg. Malay, Javanese, Kelantanese; Chinese, Cantonese; Indian, Tamil; or others)

Please state:.....

9. State the ethnic composition of your residential area during your childhood:

[1] Mostly Malay
[2] Mostly Chinese
[3] Mostly Indian
[4] Malay-Chinese equal
[5] Malay-Indians equal
[6] Chinese-Indians equal
[7] Others

10. State the ethnic composition of your residential area currently:

[1] Mostly Malay
[2] Mostly Chinese
[3] Mostly Indian
[4] Malay-Chinese equal
[5] Malay-Indians equal
[6] Chinese-Indians equal
[7] Others

10. What language or languages do you speak?

[1] Malay
[2] Chinese
[3] Tamil
[4] English
[5] Others

11. Which language based newspaper do you read?

[1] Malay
[2] Chinese
[3] Tamil
[4] English
[5] Others

12. Which language based television programmes do you watch?

[1] Malay
[2] Chinese
[3] Tamil
[4] English
[5] Others

13. Do you consider yourself religious?

[1] Religious
[2] Normal
[3] Not very
[4] Not at all

14. Are you a member in any of your ethnic organisation? If no, do you wish to become one in future?

[1] Yes [2] Wish to [3] Do not wish to

15. Given a choice, which political party would you prefer to govern multi-ethnic Malaysia?

[1] The National Front
[2] Democratic Action Party
[3] PAS
[4] A Socialist Party
[5] Do not know
[6] Others

Appendix 2: Other Findings

(i) Chapter 6: Findings by Ethnic Group and Sex

Table A.1: Ethnic Composition during Childhood, Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Mostly Malays	91	81	29	25
Mostly Chinese	0	3	42	49
Malay-Chinese equal	7	14	23	18
Other mixed areas	2	2	6	8
	100	100	100	100

Table A.2: Ethnic Composition at Present, by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Mostly Malays	58	57	25	19
Mostly Chinese	14	12	44	52
Malay-Chinese equal	25	26	24	23
Other mixed areas	3	5	7	6
	100	100	100	100

Table A.3: Percentage of Subjects Speaking Different Languages, by Ethnic Group and Gender

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Mother tongue	100	100	100	100
Mother tongue only	29	30	0	0
Mother tongue & English	71	69	100	100
Malay & Chinese	5	6	100	100

Table A.4: Percentage of Subjects Reading Different Language Newspapers, by Ethnic Group and Gender

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Malay newspaper	100	99	90	90
Chinese newspaper	0	0	53	60
English newspaper	79	91	94	91

Table A.5: Contact with Other Ethnic Groups, by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Frequently	68	56	81	79
Sometimes	31	31	19	17
Seldom	1	13	0	4
	100	100	100	100

Table A.6: Contact with Malays, by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Frequently	98	97	82	75
Sometimes	2	3	18	22
Seldom	0	0	0	3
	100	100	100	100

Table A.7: Contact with Chinese, by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Frequently	59	53	99	97
Sometimes	40	38	1	3
Seldom	1	9	0	0
	100	100	100	100

Table A.8: Contact with Indians, by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Frequently	34	39	33	44
Sometimes	52	39	46	36
Seldom	14	22	21	20
	100	100	100	100

Table A.9: Percentage of Subjects Making Contact With Different Occupational Groups, By Ethnic Group and Gender

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Agricultural	13	6	13	12
Factory	19	16	15	10
General Services	71	81	77	91
Business	18	18	9	8
Executive	20	14	24	21

Table A.10: Rukunegara, by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Remember fully	91	92	87	87
Remember partly	7	8	11	10
Do not remember	2	0	1	3
	100	100	100	100

Table A.11: Percentage Who Believe These as Serious National Problems, by Ethnic Group and Gender

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Corruption	42	51	61	71
Religious Deviation	4	10	9	13
Poverty	29	35	34	22
Drug Addiction	48	77	54	60
Political Disunity	32	40	18	23
Unequal...Education	1	10	48	52
Ethnic Differences	27	29	42	42

Table A.12: Subjects' Responses to Statements Questions, by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

Issues		MM	MF	CM	CF
1. Standing for National Anthem					
	Agree	91	92	92	98
	Disagree	6	4	7	0
2. Racial Discrimination					
	Agree	11	18	48	52
	Disagree	84	81	47	46
3. Dependency on Government					
	Agree	82	81	88	76
	Disagree	16	19	11	20
4. Indonesian Migrants					
	Agree	49	54	57	47
	Disagree	47	44	42	47
5. Migration of Dissatisfied					
	Agree	67	79	35	32
	Disagree	28	18	59	56
6. Malaysia for All Malaysians					
	Agree	90	87	97	99
	Disagree	10	11	3	1
7. Advantageous of Multiethnic					
	Agree	78	82	91	87
	Disagree	19	16	9	9

MM (Malay Males); MF (Malay Females);
CM (Chinese Males); CF (Chinese Females)

Table A.13: Quality of Ethnic Relation in Malaysia at Present, by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Good	47	52	49	47
Moderate	53	48	49	53
Bad	0	0	1	0
	100	100	100	100

Table A.14: Current Ethnic Relations in Locality by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Good	55	49	66	61
Moderate	43	51	32	34
Bad	2	0	2	5
	100	100	100	100

Table A.15: Ethnic Relations in Malaysia Compared to 5 Years ago, by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Has Improved	70	67	51	52
Remain the Same	25	30	42	43
Has Deteriorated	5	3	7	5
	100	100	100	100

Table A.16: Ethnic Relations in Locality Compared to 5 years ago, by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Has Improved	64	57	42	44
Remain the Same	35	40	54	53
Has Deteriorated	1	3	4	3
	100	100	100	100

Table A.17: Ethnic Relation in Malaysia in the Next 5 Years, by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Will Improve	71	70	61	60
Remain the Same	27	25	28	31
Will Deteriorate	2	5	11	9
	100	100	100	100

Table A.18: Ethnic Relations in Locality in the Next 5 Years, by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Will Improve	68	65	54	58
Remain the Same	32	30	41	39
Will Deteriorate	0	5	5	3
	100	100	100	100

Table A.19: Organisational Membership, by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Yes	38	30	26	21
Wish to	28	30	37	35
Do Not Wish to	34	40	33	38
Undecided	0	0	4	6
	100	100	100	100

Table A.20: Choice of Political Party, by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
National Front (NF)	73	79	78	74
Democratic...(DAP)	0	0	3	4
Islamic...(PAS)	19	9	0	0
Socialist...	3	0	2	1
Do Not Know	4	12	14	18
Others	0	0	3	3
	100	100	100	100

Table A.21: Choice of Leader, by Ethnic Group and Gender (%)

	Malay Males	Malay Females	Chinese Males	Chinese Females
Halim	11	6	9	12
Ong Cheng Piaw	2	0	6	1
Zulkifli	82	90	55	46
Wong Ting Seng	1	1	15	20
Others	4	3	15	21
	100	100	100	100

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